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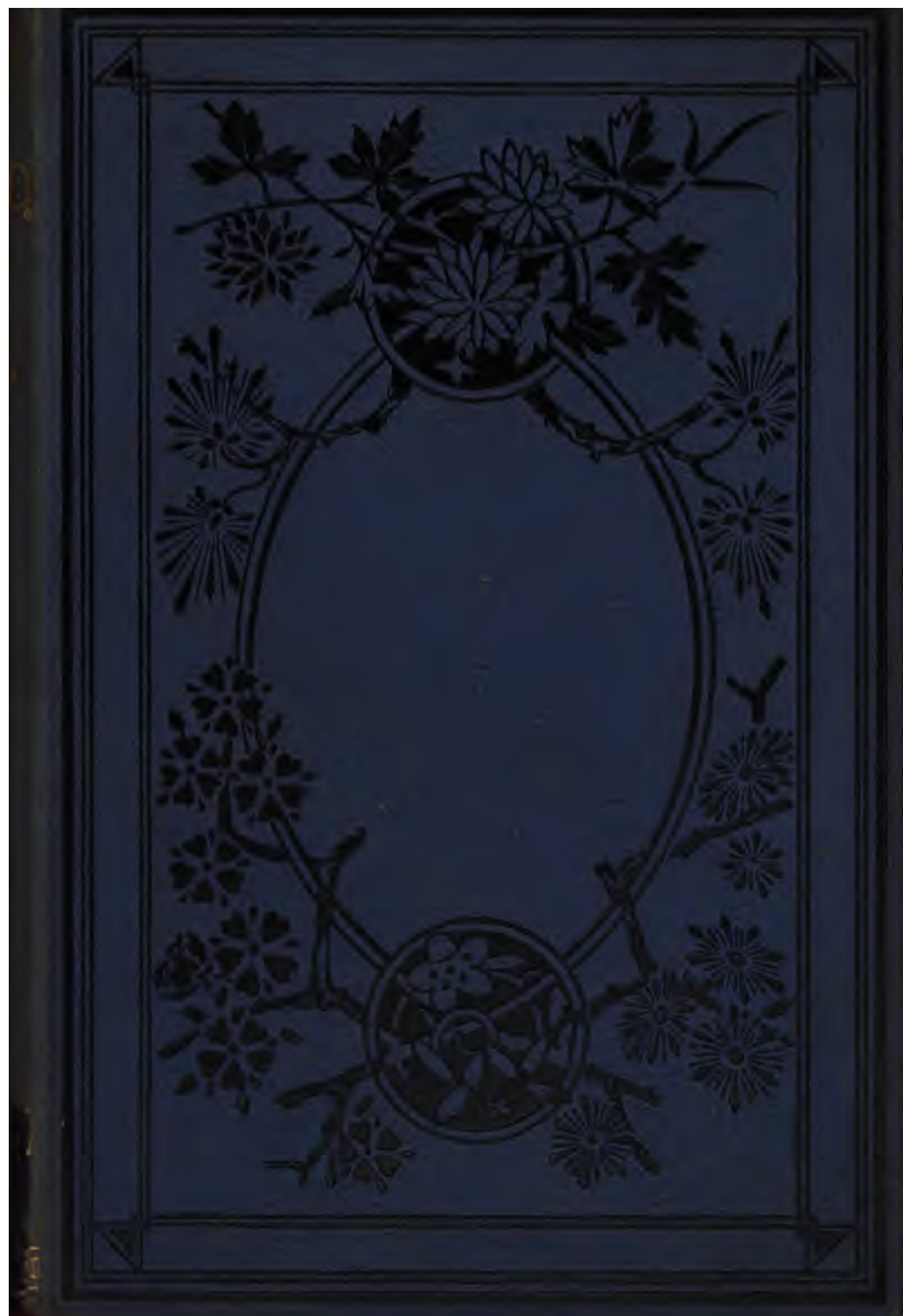
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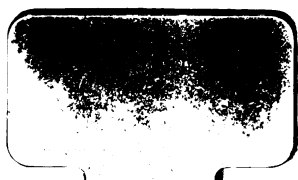
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A LAGGARD IN LOVE

By ANNIE THOMAS,

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP)

AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "PLAYED OUT," "CALLED TO ACCOUNT,"
"THE DOWER HOUSE," ETC., ETC.

"Lilies for a bridal bed,
Roses for a matron's head,
Violets for a maiden dead !
Pansies let my flowers be !
On the living grave I bear
Scatter them without a tear ;
Let no friend, however dear,
Waste one hope, one fear for me."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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A LAGGARD IN LOVE.



CHAPTER I.

FOR ROWLEY'S SAKE.

“So Hengeholme is sold! So the Norrises are to be turned out for a new-comer, who can put ready money into Mr. Rowley Galton's greedy hands and empty purse.” So the young heir of the Galtonsweir estate has proved himself a man of the period sufficiently to part with a few acres—a slice of the property—rather than hold it on to his own detriment!

Hengeholme has found a purchaser; and still Mrs. Norris is radiant, for she is to remain on a ‘tenant at will,’ and that

will entirely her own. Nor has it gone out of the family ; for though Rowley has parted with it on terms that make him feel as if his head were rapidly coming above water again, it has passed into the possession of one who, though not a Galton born, has the Galton glory and interest at heart as thoroughly as any one of them—Annie, the dowager.

The new lady of the demesne has come down and taken up her abode in the house of her tenants in as quiet a state as can be conceived ; and as soon as she is settled (not before) she hears that Rowley Galton and Wallace Adair are both at Galtonswear. It is for their sakes that she has left London and sought to quiet scandal's voice, and now they are here at her gates, and it will be too abject a confession of weakness for her to make, to flee afield still further from them. She reminds herself that she began negotiating for the purchase of Hengeholme before Rowley and Wal-

lace had any intention of paying this visit to Galtonswear. "And as their visit being coincident with my coming into this residence is an accident, I'll treat it as such," she says to herself, as she comes down to breakfast in the best parlour (which is ceded entirely to her now) the morning after her arrival.

Mr. Grainger, the artist lodger, has been banished to a public-house in the adjacent village, where he is revelling in the long-coveted delights of a sanded floor and an ivied casement, in which latter many earwigs reside. He has moved his easel and the two big pictures at which he is working out of doors, but traces of him are to be found in abundance about the best parlour. Studies of Rhoda and others (among those others, one of Grace), sketches of the scenery around that is almost monotonous in its unvarying beauty, and ideas dashed in with fervid vigour and startling colour, for him to fall back upon in the dreary

winter days in London, when he is painting his long contemplated and promised 'Dream of Fair Women.'

Annie Galton has gauged the artist with tolerable correctness, partly through the medium of his works, and partly through Mrs. Norris's frequent and irrelevant mention of him. The excellent woman and anxious mother has him, so to say, on the tip of her tongue, in season and out of season. She refers to him with an attempt at unpremeditation when she is holding solemn converse with the dowager as to the latter's dinner. She casually drags him in by means of one of his own sketches, which she affects to have just found, never to have seen before, and upon whose merits she is desirous of obtaining her ladyship's opinion. And her ladyship gives her opinion—a favourable one invariably—with true womanly, sympathetic feeling, and feels that Rhoda's eyes are searching her through and through the while, and that

Rhoda's heart is palpitating with pride and dread—pride in that the lady who is so great a one in her eyes, admires so heartily the works of Rhoda's idol; dread that the admiration may reach him on his pedestal, and in turn transform him into an idolator.

A few very quiet weeks ensue on Annie's settling at Hengeholme. She does it so unpretentiously that the Galtonswear people hear nothing of her, and so leave her to the undisturbed solitude which she is sincerely striving to like. But the days are long and weary to the woman who has had so many interests to fill those past days in London. She has no occupation that she is bound to pursue; and whatever the book she may be reading, however steadily her eyes may be bent upon the page, she only sees the name of Rowley there, and the sweetest meaning of the best-written romance is obliterated by a sweeter memory.

Long quiet drives in her little pony

carriage, always in the opposite direction to Galtonswear, fill up a good deal of her time. But the drives are as solitary as the hours spent in the best parlour, and the thoughts that she garners up out among the beauties of Nature are not much more enlivening and invigorating than are those that sadden her when she sits alone of an evening, wondering whether it is indifference, prudence, or ignorance that keeps Rowley away from her. Undecided as she is on this point, she is very definite on another, and that is that she will not move a hair's breadth in Rowley's direction. The days are weary and long without him; but she will make no effort to brighten them by giving him a sign that she is so near, and so longing for his presence. The days are weary and long, and will continue to be so all the days of her life, for Rowley is the only being who can make them radiant, and Rowley, her prophetic heart tells her, will never be

more to her than he is at present, save perhaps grateful.

It has been well kept, that secret of hers as to the purchase of Hengeholme. Rowley little knows, as he looks down upon it grievously sometimes from the common, that the unknown stranger, against whom he girds in his heart for having obtained possession of land that he feels ought to have been his own still, is that lost—no! not lost—left-off love of his. Still less would he be likely to fathom the motive which made her buy it, even if he could discover the fact of her having done so. For Annie has a motive underlying the surface one of investing her ready money profitably—a motive that her lawyer alone knows of, he having put it into solid legal shape for her satisfaction; and, though he thinks it weak and womanly, he fails to turn her from her resolve, or to make her see the folly of it.

A rumour reaches her at length that Alice Adair is at Galtonsweir, domiciled there quite as one of the family, and her heart sinks within her as she realizes the probability of Rowley giving her occasion to make her motive manifest to him soon. She hears how the girl devotes herself to the Galton interest and service, teaching Isabel secrets of economy that enable the latter to put a far fairer face upon the aspect of domestic affairs than has been seen there since the days of their downfall. She hears also how the always irascible and now mad Sir Oliver is soothed to such softness by her presence, that the restraint upon him has been relaxed, and the charge of keeping him quiet and amused almost entirely relegated to her. She is told by Mrs. Norris, who is unconscious of the bitterly sweet interest the dowager takes in the subject, that "they do say Miss Adair prepares a good many of Mr. Rowley's examination papers for

him, and so enables him to do more tutoring work than he could otherwise achieve." And with an aching heart poor Annie acknowledges that verily Alice is proving herself in such a way to Rowley that all the latter's friends ought to desire to see the inevitable end. "I won't bribe him to hasten it; but my wedding gift to his bride shall show him that at least I have thought of them both, with all the greater tenderness that I haven't dared to show it lately," she says to herself, and she longs to begin to enlarge and decorate Hengeholme in such a way that Rowley can never quite forget her, when he is living there with his bride.

It is a dangerous as well as a difficult task to make Mrs. Norris understand that the time may come, and that before very long, when she may have to leave the house, even if she retain the land. It is dangerous, because in her wrath Mrs. Norris may blurt out the secret of the

dowager's being the owner of the place, which is the one of all others that the dowager desires to have kept just at present. And it is difficult because, without explaining everything, which she has no intention of doing, Annie finds Mrs. Norris stubbornly failing to comprehend how and why the dowager's will can ever cease to be all-potent concerning Hengeholme. "You must be going to marry, my lady, spite of that shamefullest of all wills?" she says, with a futile effort to eliminate every assent of censure from her interrogation. "You must be going to marry, that's what it is; and your husband as is to be is one you're so afraid of already, that you feel you won't be mistress of your own property when he is the master of you?"

"I can only tell you that I may not be always mistress of my own property—that I may not be mistress of it many weeks longer even; but I am not going to marry,

now or ever. I promise you this, that the new owner will be just as glad of you as a tenant 'as I am ; and we'll see about building a new house for Rhoda and you—a pretty little one, not a great rambling one like this," Annie says with the utmost suavity, though she feels the most sovereign contempt for a woman who can only think of such a petty sacrifice as a change of residence, when she (Annie) is preparing to make such a far greater one herself. Mrs. Norris takes in the sense of the sentence, but will not perceive the suavity, or at any rate will not respond to it.

" Thank you, my lady, for what you say about my keeping on the farm ; but as for your ladyship thinking that I could be content in another home than this, you're mistaken. I've been here bride, wife, and widow nigh on thirty years, and the most change I've had from it has been when I've visited my daughters to tea in their

married homes. As for building a new little house for Rhoda and me, you're good to think of it, but I'll spare you the trouble. If I go from here I shall go right away; and Rhoda has her own diversions and schemes, and her mother hasn't much to do with them now, I'm thinking."

"Is it this young artist of whom I hear you speak so often?" Annie says coaxingly, for she longs to change the current of Mrs. Norris's thoughts. The poor dowager lacks that superb moral courage which enables its possessor to remain calm and comfortable when another person chooses to feel unreasonably injured or outraged, and additionally elects to make that feeling very apparent in a designedly irritating way. Accordingly, she is very desirous now of introducing a topic which Mrs. Norris has hitherto always treated with the utmost pride and tenderness, and so throws the artistic sop to the maternal Cerberus with unadvised openness.

"He is like the rest of them," Mrs. Norris replies, with angry scorn. "Your ladyship would quail if I could tell you how he's treated that poor child; and she goes on loving the ground he walks on, and hating me for telling her that he is only doing her a mischief. Here he came down painting her, and telling her she's pretty, and letting her think that he thought a deal about her looks, and her fresh, wild young ways; and now that he is gone out of the house he is always up at Galstonweir, and Rhoda's breaking her heart about it."

"The worst of it is hearts don't break," Annie says sadly; "but as it's so hard to feel that it's *nearly* breaking for one's self, it must be harder still to feel it for a daughter. I wish I could see this Mr. Grainger—I mean see him to speak to him and know him. I should soon find out if he had been trying to fool Rhoda. If he has, my cousins at Galtonsweir will

have nothing to do with him—at least, I can answer for Mr. Rowley.”

“And what good will that do my Rhoda?” Mrs. Norris asks fiercely. “No, my lady; if a girl can’t get the husband she ought to have without another woman’s help, she’s better without him, in my opinion. If I’d been married to please another woman, I might feel as if he cared more for the one he pleased than for me.”

She looks suspiciously at the dowager as she says this. Her maternal jealousy makes her fear that the young artist, who has won her daughter’s heart without any arduous wooing, may be dazzled, by Lady Galton’s taking an interest in him, into letting his fickle fancy wander in her direction. Up to the present time Mrs. Norris has disregarded Mr. Grainger’s entreaties to be brought into communication with the dowager, who occupies the anomalous position of being lady of the land and lodger in the house. In Mrs. Norris’s

opinion, Mr. Grainger is irresistible, and she cannot help fearing, now that there has been this talk of Hengeholme changing ownership again, that the widow has already cast a favourable eye upon him. So again poor Annie is misunderstood.

CHAPTER II.

“AT LAST, MY DARLING!”

IN furtherance of her recently developed scheme of economizing in every way that is practicable, Annie gives up her London house, sells her furniture, and “puts down” every carriage she has possessed, replacing the latter with a little low dog-cart, and a stout cob pony that is not beyond the management of a village boy, who is now her only groom. It is natural that this step should afford amusement to some who are inclined to think that the widow has been “outrunning the constable.” It is also natural that it causes more amazement to others who know that she

has been doing nothing of the kind. Among these latter is her brother Albert, who, having had her address confided to him, makes his way down to Hengeholme, and gets rid of the hours of the first evening of his arrival in conjecturing what demon of mystery is in possession of his sister, and "what people do who live in the country all the year round."

The following morning, however, he finds this effort at the analyzation of motive an insufficient occupation, and after gathering more roses than Annie knows well how to dispose of, and moaning a little about being bereft of the morning papers, a happy thought appears to strike him in an impromptu manner.

"Let us go over to Galtonswear; I want to see Rowley," he suggests; and Annie colours, half with joy at the mere idea of seeing Rowley, and half with jealousy at the thought of seeing him with Alice Adair.

"You can have the pony-trap and go over, of course, Albert; but it will make a sensation scene if I go. They don't know I am here, and I don't like dropping from the clouds upon people in that way," she says; but all the while she does long to be pressed and persuaded to go, for she is yearning to see Rowley again in a legitimate way, and, moreover, she pines to test her strength in the matter of seeing him with Alice.

"Awfully selfish of you to have kept them in the dark," Albert says reproachfully. "They must be dull enough, poor girls, from all I hear from that horrible old Lowler, alone there, with not a soul to speak to, and no means of getting about the country."

"They are not alone," she says quietly.

"Wallace Adair is there, I know, spending his holidays. How does the fellow manage to get holidays whenever he has a place to go and spend them in, I wonder? You

used to like Wallace, Annie. What has he done that you haven't seen him down here? Or are you tired of him too?"

"I can't bear that flippant tone about anything like friendship or—regard of any kind," she says gently. "Wallace has done nothing, and I am not tired of him, but it has been expedient that I should hold aloof from him and his friends."

"His friends being your own cousins!"

"His friends being my own cousins, and rather dearer to me than cousins are generally," she answers, looking up bravely into her brother's face. "Besides, Alice Adair is there, as you know, Albert, and where she is I had better not be, if Rowley is there too."

"Why not?" he asks quickly. "Look here, Annie; you've driven that notion about Rowley and Alice so firmly into your own mind, that you let it colour every action of your life, and I believe it's a mistaken one all the time. *I hope* it's a

mistaken one, any way ; for *I* can afford to follow my fancy, which Rowley can't do or hasn't the pluck to do, and my fancy is to ask Alice to be my wife. Now will you come with me to Galtonswair ? ”

“ You must not tempt Alice to be disloyal to Rowley ; he has been true to her so long,” the widow says. But even as she says it, her memory goes back to that sweet time when Rowley first began to strike those chords in her heart, which have never ceased to thrill since, though between now and then she has been a dutiful wife and a really sorrowing widow.

“ I won't tempt her ; I'll speak out straight like a man, and she must take me or leave me at once,” Albert says resolutely. “ It's no use beating about the bush. I've come down to do it, and I'll do it without delay, and take my answer, whatever it may be, back to town with me to-night. Now, dear, put on your hat and come with me, and, if Rowley carries the day against me,

show them that you can stand it as well as I can."

She gives a shudder by way of reply, and Albert asks, with a sudden suspicion that his sister is not quite so superficial as she has often sought to make them believe her to be—

"What is it, dear? What gave you pain?"

"Not pain—horror!" she answers, rallying in a moment. "What gave it to me, I don't know—I can't even imagine. I have the feeling that I ought to go to-day because it's my destiny; and I don't *want* to go on reasonable grounds, and I do want to go on unreasonable ones."

"Be yourself, be a woman, be Annie, be unreasonable—go!" he laughs out joyously; and his sister catches the infection of his mirth, and goes with a light step and a light heart to get ready for this visit to Galtonsweir.

It is late autumn now; the leaves are

in greater abundance on the ground than on the trees, but they are going to decay gorgeously in crimson and gold. The air is crisp and clear, and as they drive over the common a fresh young breeze starts up to greet and invigorate them. Beautiful distances stand out so brilliantly that they seem to be quite near. The waving woods of larch and poplar and linden trees, which clothe the slopes of Galtonswear, have never looked fairer in the eyes of their late mistress than they are looking to-day. She cannot help feeling a certain passionate pleasure in the mere fact of being alive, which has never possessed her before to-day. "The world is very fair; life is very sweet," she admits to herself, though the fairest flower grown in it, "love," may not be gathered by her. "I am glad I came with you; whatever happens, Albert, I shall be glad all my life that I came with you to-day," she says suddenly. Poor Annie!

It is past mid-day when they pull up at

the grand entrance to Galtonswear, and her heart sinks a little as she marks the unmistakable stamp of poverty which is set upon everything. The geraniums that are straggling out of bounds in the terrace beds and the big marble vases in the portico show, in their untrimmed, unpruned luxuriance, the want of a gardener's hand. The summer sun has blistered the paint off the door, and faded the window-blinds, and cracked the over-mellow surface of the drive. There is the air over everything of nothing being replenished in time to save it from ruin ; and Annie sorrows at the spectacle, and all her sorrow is for Rowley.

They get a very warm welcome. In spite of that undefinable and undesigned something in the manner both of Rowley and his sisters, they are bound to admit that the welcoming is a worthy one. The two girls surround Annie and shut her off from Rowley for a time, flattering her by

their assiduous attentions, and making her regret that she has held aloof from so much affectionate regard hitherto; and Lady Galton herself—Rowley's poor over-weighted mother—comes away from her post of duty to thank the widow with grateful cordiality for coming to enliven the monotony to which the poor girls are condemned.

"And Alice Adair will be so glad to see you, my dear," Lady Galton says in good faith. "She often tells us of all the kindness you showed her in London. She's with Sir Oliver now, but I'll call her out to see you."

"Don't disturb her," Annie stammers. "I shall see her in good time, I dare say." She glances at Rowley as she speaks, and Rowley edges his way in between his sisters, and responds to her glance in words.

"You were never more mistaken in your life. She is here entirely as the girls'

friend, and a splendid little friend she is, Annie; but nothing more than that to me, I assure you."

His sisters fall back a pace or two as he says this; but apparently he has no desire to envelop his views about Alice in mystery, for he does not lower his voice half a note even. Albert hears the remark, and feels annoyed and pleased at the same time. The annoyance is caused by Rowley's cool renunciation of the girl he (Albert) covets; the pleasure is due to the fact of his finding the field so honourably clear for him.

"If I am mistaken, so is all the neighbourhood, Rowley," Annie says, as blithely as it is possible for a woman to speak when her own words are cutting her to the quick. "I hear how dear she has made herself to you all, and how valuable she is to you; why should you profess to consider what is so expedient 'a mistake'?"

"Come out for a stroll in the grounds before luncheon, and I'll try to tell you," he replies ; and so they go out together, she shyly, but very, very gladly, and he triumphantly.

They walk along in silence for several minutes, till they find themselves at the end of a turfed glade that leads down to the lake, and here, a convenient bench offering itself, seat themselves, and simultaneously find the silence embarrassing, and break it with an attempt at a laugh.

"So you have bought Hengeholme?" he says presently.

"I have. But who told you?" she answers.

"Instinct, to-day. Your secret has been well kept by your lawyer ; but why have you made it a secret, Annie?"

"If I tell you the whole truth, will you promise not to argue with me, or blame me, or seem to think I have done anything very foolish?" she asks nervously.

"Whatever you do, or have done, or mean to do, is sure to be right in my eyes," he says tenderly.

"Well then, Rowley, I have bought Hengeholme to give it away again."

"The devil you have!"

"Yes, I have—whether by the goodwill of the devil or not, I can't say; anyhow, I meant well in buying it, and I shall mean well in bestowing it. I can give away what I like during my life, if I don't touch my income, you know, Rowley; and so I mean to give Hengeholme to Alice Adair the day you marry her."

She speaks very steadily, and looks him straight in the face as she speaks, but he reads a portion of the pain she feels in her pathetic eyes and paling face.

"My love, my darling, if Alice Adair came to me with the world as her dowry, I would not make her my wife after what you have said! Let us brave the bitterest that fortune may have in store for us

together. Let us forfeit everything else in order to gain the chief thing—the right to proclaim that our love is the real, strong, true thing we have proved it to be.”

His arms are around her as he speaks, his kisses are on her lips as he ceases speaking. In her delirium of happiness at hearing these words from him at last, she yields herself to his embraces, and forgets Alice, her intention about Hengeholme, her dread of poverty for Rowley—everything, in fact, save the luxury of loving him and of listening to his words of love. She forgets all these things for a few brief minutes, during which she tells him how long he has been dear to her, and recapitulates each incident and recalls each scene which has strengthened his claim upon her heart. And he answers her confession with an ampler one, if possible, and responds to her warmth with a warmth that makes her feel that her ardour is as water unto wine compared to his, and leaves her

no excuse for doubting him or deeming that she would have been wiser to have been more reticent.

So, for a few too brief, too happy minutes, they sit baring their souls to each other. Then falls the inevitable silence that must intervene when love is too deep for words. In that silence, full of sweetness as it is, she begins to think ; and with thought comes sadness. The crisp air seems to grow heavier, a shadow falls athwart the sun, a chill creeps into the atmosphere, and, with a shudder, Annie feels impelled to break the dear spell which has been cast over her.

"It will never, never do, Rowley! I have been worse than weak to let you speak as if it could be, and to listen and answer as I have listened and answered. Our marriage would mean poverty ; and though, in theory, I can bear that for myself, I can't even bear it in theory for you."

"We should be just in the same position

which you magnanimously proposed I should occupy with Alice Adair," he says laughingly; for he has no fear now of losing the woman he has won, however she may suffer fear to assail her soul, and seek to subside away from him.

She shakes her head by way of reply in the negative.

"Yes, precisely the same position," he repeats authoritatively. "Hengeholme, having been bought out of your savings, would be yours still, and with all doubts about you and my future at rest, I shall be excellently well able to cope with the difficulties the estate has been plunged in till they clear themselves away. Think of what we have before us, dear! Don't look back an inch, if the past prospect isn't pleasant to you. Think of what an incentive you will be to me; think of how you will aid me to make a career, and of how you will glorify it when it is made; think of yourself as the queen of this

kingdom once again, as the wife of my heart, the mother of my children, as the love of my life; and come back and let me proclaim you to be all these things to them at home at once."

He has conquered once and for ever now, he feels, as her arms tighten their clasp round his neck and, holding her head back for a moment before she meets his sealing kiss, she says—

"Pray God I may be all these things, and more too, to you, Rowley; but it seems too great happiness for it ever really to fall to my portion, and I fear I shall taste it through much trouble to another."

"If Alice ever had more than the liking which habit and custom engender for me, she has lost it long ago. Your conscience may be at rest about her; no girl blinded by love could see my faults half as plainly as Alice does——"

"Oh yes, Rowley; she may 'hate the sin and love the sinner.'"

“That I could believe if big, grand crimes were in question; but no girl who is really in love could be sensible and reasonable about minor sins and offences committed by the object. She looks a whole page of reprehension if I ever lag in my work, and a whole volume of it if I let anything like a chance slip, through not pursuing it in a plodding, tradesman-like way.”

“That she does for your good——”

“And no man ever thanked a woman for being disagreeable for his good,” Rowley interrupts. “Come, Annie, don’t make me say anything unjust or unkind to Alice, by forcing me to think about her, when it’s against nature that I should think of any one but you just now. Let us go back presently, and show ourselves in our true colours.”

“Pose as ‘the happy pair’ before the family, in fact. No, Rowley, I can’t do that quite yet. Tell them what we have

done when I am gone, and leave it to themselves how they will *all* treat me; courtesy might compel them to be kinder than they feel if the disclosure were made in my presence. Wait till I am gone."

"It shall be as you will, dear," Rowley says; and though he tries to feel as if he were conceding a great point to Annie in not divulging it all at once, he is in reality relieved to find that, for a few hours at least, no one will look at him as if he ought to give an explanation.

CHAPTER III.

"I AM VERY, VERY GRATEFUL."

LUNCHEON is on the table by the time they get in, and Annie feels that her cheeks flash and her eyes lower themselves as she sees Alice trying to beautify and refine it by arranging a few flowers upon it. "Just like a daughter of the house would do," she thinks. It is a sharper trial than the dowager had anticipated, this meeting with the girl whom she has so long regarded as her successful rival and whom she has so unexpectedly eclipsed. Annie had come prepared to suffer pain, to feel thrilled by jealousy, and depressed by seeing good cause for pitying herself. But

Rowley has revolutionized these sentiments, and she is conscious that something nearly resembling shame is her dominant sensation, as Alice, bright, fair, fresh, and composed as ever, greets her heartily.

"I heard you were gone out with Rowley into the grounds, and I'd have followed you at once to see if the recluse of Hengeholme could possibly be the bright dowager, but I had to stay with Sir Oliver," Alice says unconstrainedly. And Annie breathes a thanksgiving that something did intervene to prevent such an inopportune appearance on the scene as Miss Adair would have been. Annie feels a traitor as she gives her hand to the girl, who is so absolutely unsuspecting of what has taken place out in the grounds that she can actually calmly mention that she had desired to join them. Rowley was right; it would have been far braver, better, and more honourable to everybody for them to have come in

and openly declared themselves to be what they are to each other. But Rowley has apparently quite relinquished the desire to do so. Indeed, as she watches him light-heartedly helping Alice to make a salad, in a way that shows that he is well accustomed both to his task and to his companion in it, it almost seems to Annie that he has relinquished her and his hopes concerning her also.

"I won't let myself be jealous," she tells herself, "but——"

But she is, in spite of her resolution not to be, and her declaration to herself that she has no reason to be. The mixing of that salad takes a long time, and it appears as if Rowley were helpless in the matter both of pouring in the condiments and stirring them, unless he receives constant and clear directions from his coadjutor. "He looks as if he felt he ought to try and make up to Alice for something," Annie thinks, "and that some-

thing must be his ill-advised, and probably by this time bitterly repented of, offer to me."

It is in vain, with these thoughts distracting her mind, and these fears causing her heart to pulsate unequally, that she attempts to carry on a coherent conversation with the others. Albert does not aid her at all either, for he too has grown sulky at the sight of the salad mixing.

"Rowley just does enough to keep her off from any other fellow without being on with her himself; and it's not fair, and the girl must be a fool to stand it, and not worth any other fellow's having," Albert thinks. Nevertheless, though he thinks this, he resolves to say his say very clearly to Alice when they all go out for a walk in the afternoon. Over and over again he reminds himself, not snobbishly, but as a matter of fact, that he can afford to please himself, and that Rowley cannot, and that therefore it behoves him not to

waver out of any false consideration for Rowley's vacillation and Rowley's inability. And all the while he is thinking thus, his sister is seeing signs of such love for Rowley in Alice, as almost shatters her but just erected fabric of happiness, and shadows forth to her the possibility of Rowley being so much in earnest that he cannot help developing real and true affection for two women at the same time.

There is a faint suggestion offered by Alice, when the subject of the walk is mooted, that she shall remain at home with Lady Galton, and aid in beguiling the hours of the afternoon for moody, morose Sir Oliver. But Isabel overrules this suggestion.

"Alice is always sacrificing herself for everybody," she says; "she shall have this change to-day. It does her good, as it does the rest of us, to see fresh faces and hear fresh ideas. She is so beautifully devoted to papa that she hasn't

even been out with Rowley for the last week."

"And that must have been a dreadful deprivation to her," Annie says, with quivering lips, and a feeling at her heart as if a cord were being wound round it.

"Yes, he is the only pleasant element in the life she is leading down here for our sakes," Isabel replies. She is determined if Alice does eventually lose Rowley, that it shall be through no half-hearted partisanship on her (Isabel's) part. In Miss Galton's eyes, Rowley is honour-bound to Alice by the unquestioning way in which he accepts Alice's loyalty to his family, and the taking it for granted air with which he views the self-abnegating course she pursues with regard to his father. Isabel would as soon offer her brother a dram, if she knew him to be a drunkard, as she would smooth away any obstacle that good luck placed in the way of his coming to a clear understanding

with the dowager. So now she speaks of Rowley's being the only pleasant element in Alice's life with the affectionately authoritative air of one who is very sure of the facts, and convinced of the desirability of those facts being well recognized.

Accordingly, it is ordained that Alice shall accompany them; and the little procession starts to explore the beauties of a remote part of the park, each member charged with hopes and fears, dreads and anticipations, that are sealed letters to the others. Even Grace has a look in her face which would betray expectation of the possibility of some pleasure, if ignorance on the part of the rest did not blind them to what would otherwise have been too legible. Mr. Grainger—Rhoda Norris's handsome artist-friend—has for some time discerned the beauty of the sheltered glade towards which they are now wending their way; and Grace has been in the habit of looking at its loveliness with him. She is

wondering now what he will feel and do when he sees her companions this afternoon, and a slight qualm passes through her nerves as she reflects that if Rowley is not too much engrossed with his own affairs, he may not favourably regard the unauthorized presence of this stranger within his gates. Actuated by this consideration, she strives to shield herself from any wrath to come by being vivaciously amiable and companionable to her brother, thus effectually preventing his offering that reassurance to Annie for which she is craving.

The only one who unhesitatingly and fully carries out the design he had in his head when the walk was proposed is Albert. He has a true Englishman's horror of beating about the bush—a real business-like antipathy to anything like procrastination. He engages Alice's attention, and chains it to himself at once

by his opening remark, as they come down the steps from the hall-door. "Will you walk on ahead with me? I want to speak to you about a better situation for Wallace," he says. And her heart jumps buoyantly at the prospect of anything good for Wallace, and she walks on willingly enough with the man who has a scheme to propose for Wallace's benefit. The scheme, as rapidly and clearly unrolled before the eager, anxious sister's eyes, is a very sensible and feasible one. Wallace has proved himself an admirable secretary to the company for whom he has been working at a salary of three hundred a year. There is nothing Quixotically generous, therefore, in the conduct of Albert Fane, in offering to procure Wallace another secretaryship, the filling of which has fallen into his (Albert's) hands, at a salary of six hundred a year. Alice listens to his offer, and accepts it with avidity for her brother, without a single thought of herself.

"I am very, very grateful to you," she says, when he has made his meaning and intentions about Wallace clear to her. She means the gratitude she expresses most heartily and truly. Nevertheless it does not strike her that there is anything out of the ordinary way in Mr. Fane's conduct. He has seen Wallace, and having seen him it is but natural that Albert Fane or anybody else should seek to know more of Wallace, and serve him if possible. For her own part, Alice is ready at any given moment to resign any plan or any hope that only concerns herself, if by her doing so she can benefit her brother. Albert Fane's interest in Wallace, therefore, she feels to be laudable, but natural.

"I don't want gratitude from you, Miss Adair," the prosperous young City man says, with something like emotion. "What I do for your brother I shall do, whether you give me gratitude or not. I want you to feel that Wallace is all right before I

ask you to give me something more——”

“Something more?” she interrupts, flashing a fearless interrogatory glance at him, and giving a quick, keen thought to Rowley, who is behind her—some distance behind her too—with the widow, whose widowhood seems to confer all manner of privileges upon her.

“Yes, something more! I’m not the kind of fellow to go so far and no farther, and leave a girl in doubt as to whether I’m a gentleman or a scoundrel for a week or two. The something more I ask for is your love. Will you be my wife? I came here to say this to you to-day, and if I have said it too suddenly, remember that your answer will make my happiness or misery!”

“For a few weeks at the utmost,” Alice says calmly. “Oh, Mr. Fane, you are like your sister, after all, and I have been thinking yours so much the cooler judgment of the two. I——”

“I don’t want you to analyze me; I

want you to answer me. I have spoken plainly enough to you. You must credit me with this—whether I have spoken well or ill in your estimation, at least I have spoken plainly."

For a moment or two she is silent, not in doubt, but in bewilderment. This man could cow her if he tried, she feels. He is so unconsciously masterful, in his straightforward way, that she can quite imagine herself becoming so submissive to him abruptly, that she will acquiesce in any scheme he proposes, however repugnant it may be to her. This suspicion of herself, this fear of growing supine, faintly shadowed forth as it is, nerves her to action and speech.

"You have spoken plainly, splendidly, just like the man you are; and again I assure you of my gratitude. I have nothing more to give; let us wait for the others."

She pauses as she speaks, and he sees

(and sees it with pain, for her sake more than for his own) that her gaze wanders back restlessly in search of Rowley—of Rowley, who is loitering along by Annie's side, listening to Annie's few and far between words, and wishing with all his heart that Grace would not imagine her presence to be so essential to his happiness at the present juncture.

CHAPTER IV.

JEALOUSY.

THEY are very near to the sequestered glade which Mr. Grainger purposes immortalizing on canvas, and Grace begins to experience faint thrills of emotion, half of delight, half of dread. The delight is caused by the certainty she has that her special gifts will speedily be called into play; the dread is that her brother may, in spite of the utmost efforts of her tact, misunderstand the situation, and imagine that something more compromising than has really been the case has been an element in the intercourse between the handsome young artist and herself.

To do justice to her powers of acting, she saunters into the situation by her unconscious brother's side as calmly and composedly as if she had not introduced Grainger to it in the first place, and been his daily companion in it ever since. She looks to the full as much surprised as the others do, when they catch the first glimpse of Mr. Grainger pursuing his art in the pure, strong autumnal air, among the falling leaves. She portrays surprise quite as vividly as her companions, and if a transient gleam of pleasure does flit across her face, she contrives to turn that face in such a way that only Mr. Grainger can see its expression.

They all gather round the artist, and express rapturous delight with his picture, some of them before they see what the subject of it is even. And he forgets that Mr. Galton has never accorded him permission to sketch in the Galtonswear grounds, forgets how many pleasant hours

Grace has caused him to pass here, forgets all Rhoda's openly displayed and rather fierce jealousy, in the rapturous delight he unfeignedly feels at achieving his long-desired aim, and getting introduced to the Dowager Lady Galton.

The picture is a striking one ; it tells its own story with a good deal of subtle skill and dramatic power. In mid-distance a pair of lovers are leaning over the hand-rail of a rustic bridge, absorbed in each other and their own emotions, and in the foreground a girl is watching, unseen by them, their every look and gesture. Jealousy in its utmost agony is clearly delineated in her graceful writhing form, and in the unconsciously cruel tension of the strain with which she grasps with one hand the chain by which she holds back her handsome collie dog. The faces of both girls are left unpainted still, for Arthur Grainger is going to give them respectively the features of Rhoda and

Grace, and he has not quite made up his mind yet which of the two he shall finally make jealous of the other—either in the picture or in real life! Now, five minutes after his introduction to the Dowager Lady Galton, he is more undecided than ever. It seems to him that her widowed ladyship has just that in her face that would paint well, if she became his model for either the winner or the loser in his powerfully painted picture of "Jealousy."

They stand about him admiring his picture, some with a little knowledge and understanding of its merits, and others without the faintest approach to a particle of either. Alice says the most about it, and as her remarks have an air of being critical (by reason of that habit of hers of speaking with authority, which has been engendered by the exigencies of her home life), Albert Fane would like to purchase the picture on the spot and present it to her; but he remembers those last words of

hers, and remembering them he feels sure that, gladly as he would lay his offering upon the shrine, the shrine would reject the offering. "She's not the kind of girl to take all she can get from a fellow, and refuse him the one thing he wants in return," he tells himself. And he is right. Alice is not the girl to do this or any other mean thing. Whatever she gains will be fairly and honourably gained, and gladly and freely given.

Just now, in spite of the fluent way in which she is discussing the merits and demerits of the picture, her mind is a good deal distraught. She cannot help noticing that Annie is a great deal more silent than it is her wont to be, and she has caught several explanatory glances from Rowley that are assuredly not intended for her. After all, after all these years of loving faith and waiting, it has come to this, then? Rowley not only loves her less, but he loves another woman more! "And he is

quite justified in doing so, and no one shall ever blame him for it to her." Still, though she tells herself this and means it, she has hard work to keep the tears back from the eyes that are so gravely and critically regarding Arthur Grainger's picture of "Jealousy."

Gradually Annie casts off the depression which has been her portion during the walk, and addresses herself to the task of finding out something more than is to be seen on the surface of this Mr. Grainger, whom she has discovered to be Rhoda's god and hero. Handsome he is, decidedly; clever-looking too, and with a well-bred air about him that shows her that he belongs and is accustomed to a class in which Rhoda would find herself at a disadvantage, if ever he fulfilled Mrs. Norris's dream and married her daughter. She finds it very easy to begin a conversation with him, though the elements around her are unpropitious to its continuance; for

both Rowley and Grace are vigilant to hear what she says, and to turn her attention from the artist.

"At last, after all these weeks, I have an opportunity of asking you to forgive me for having turned you out of your quarters," she says; and he replies, with what Grace deems most unnecessary ardour—

"I forgave you the moment I saw you, the day after you came." The words are simple enough, but his eyes say more than his words; his eyes say "a great deal too much," Rowley thinks, and he would call his affianced bride, "Annie, darling," before them all without delay, were it not that—he dare not, in fact, until Alice has been prepared for the tidings.

"How did you know I was myself?" she asks.

"I was in the dining-room with Mrs. Norris and Rhoda, and you crossed the garden; naturally, it was revealed to me

that you were yourself—none other than the famous dowager.”

“Why didn’t they reveal you to me?” she says softly; and he laughs a little consciously as he replies—

“Don’t you think seclusion begets selfishness? It would be difficult for the Norrises to say themselves why they don’t like me to know any one but themselves; but the fact remains, they don’t. I have occupied her best rooms, and given her so much trouble so long, and painted her daughter’s glorious red hair so often, that Mrs. Norris feels that I am her copyright, and that I must never be published to any one without her permission—don’t you understand?”

“Hardly,” Annie says, looking at him with a look that he imagines to be a searching one, though she does not intend it to be anything of the sort. “Hardly. But I have no doubt that you do.”

“And so do I,” Grace puts in amiably.

"We had an old nurse once, who was just the same. She regarded every new acquaintance we made with distrust, and thought we ought to go through life with her for our sole guide, philosopher, and friend."

"And my young friend Rhoda—does she also want the monopoly system to be applied to you, Mr. Grainger?" Annie asks quickly, with a view of distracting attention from the sneering part of Grace's speech.

"Rhoda is too young to have any views about anything yet. Moreover, if she had, I shouldn't have consulted them as I did her mother's; for if Mrs. Norris's ideas didn't meet with due consideration, the dinner suffered, and I suffered through the dinner."

"Then, if you really mean what you say, your motive for trying to please her was a much lower one than I——"

She pauses abruptly, conscious that in a paroxysm of generous, but most uncalled

for, enthusiasm on behalf of Rhoda, she is saying a great deal too much. But Mr. Grainger, though he sees her embarrassment, and though the subject is one that may become very embarrassing to himself, is determined to pursue it; for an embarrassment, provided it is mutual, may be turned to good account. The young artist, baffled so long in his harmless desire to know her, feels that he has the ball at his feet, and can kick it whithersoever he listeth now, without let or hindrance from the Norrises. So he pleads (and his eyes and the tone of his voice say to the full as much as his words)—

“Tell me what you thought was my motive? Rather than disappoint you in any way, I would make it mine, at any cost to myself!”

Annie flushes scarlet, partly with pleasure at the compliment to herself (her relish for compliments, whether broad or implied, is keen as ever, though she has

just engaged herself to Rowley, who really holds her heart against all comers), and partly with hope that she may by her influence serve Rhoda's otherwise hopeless cause with the artist. Actuated by these mixed feelings, she gives him what he has been wishing for—hope of future intercourse, namely—in these words :

“As you have now been introduced to me in proper form, you may come and see me some day ; and then, perhaps, I'll read you a lecture on what *I* think your motive ought to have been !”

“How prettily you worked your winding way to that climax, Annie !” Grace whispers suavely, as she takes the dowager's arm. The youngest Miss Galton sees in the dowager's manner to Mr. Grainger confirmation strong of the opinion she has always held of Annie, namely, that Annie loves “whate'er she looks on, and her looks go everywhere.” Grace sees nothing in the dowager's part of the in-

tercourse with the artist but the most rampant and greedy spirit of coquetry. The ulterior motive about Rhoda is a sealed book to Grace, and the latter feels chafed and defrauded, as she watches "the widow winning," as she fancies. For a moment or two Annie is disposed to take Grace into her confidence, but intuition teaching her that Grace will not forward any designs but her own on Grainger, discretion for once overrules impulse with Annie, and she holds her peace.

"As you are here," Grace says, interposing with an air of being impelled by a sense of hospitality to say words that are uttered against the grain—"as you are here, Mr. Grainger, I am sure mamma will be glad if you will come back with us and have five-o'clock tea. The light has changed, so that you can't do much more."

"Delighted!" he exclaims, and begins to put his things together with a promptitude that betrays to Grace (who knows

him well) that he has found a new, absorbing interest for the time in her cousin the dowager.

“Fickle, unstable, feather-headed, shallow-hearted wretch !” the young lady thinks. Grace has no mercy for those sins in others to which she is herself inclined. “His object is to walk home with Annie. It will be *too* flattering to his little vanity to let him take her away from Rowley ; I’ll defeat him !”

After all, his defeat in this object which she presumes to be his, is due to one who comes into unconscious alliance with Grace in pursuance of a private plan of her own. Alice Adair has been quite as watchful as either Grace or Rowley of the pair who have been making themselves the central figures of the group ; and Alice has seen what an evil effect their disregard of being conspicuous in such a way has had upon Rowley’s temper and happiness. Her regard for that happiness rises up and

takes sides with her love of directing others, against her natural feminine shrinking from furthering her rival's claims on Rowley. Anything is better, Alice feels, than that Rowley's peace of mind should be disturbed by mere frivolities, when the welfare of the whole Galton family depends in a great measure upon that mind being maintained in a peaceful state. Anything is better than that Annie through want of thought should torture the heart that Alice still feels is infinitely beyond the deserts of the volatile and fascinating dowager.

Accordingly, as they turn on their homeward path, she attaches herself to Annie, just as Grace had done before her, and prepares to "manage" Annie into that properly matured and matronly spirit and line of conduct which she (Alice) feels to be befitting in one who has been a wife and is a widow, and who, in spite of so much good having fallen to her share, has now rapaciously won Rowley.

CHAPTER V.

“ AND I HAVE ACCEPTED ROWLEY ! ”

“ You will think me a dreadful person for interfering, I’m afraid, Lady Galton ; but even at the risk of your misunderstanding me, I must venture to speak to you—to advise you again.”

Alice says this politely, but not at all humbly. Whatever she may be going to say, she is evidently quite right in her own estimation in saying it. Unquestionably the law of compensation works. Whatever the troubles and sorrows that may fall to her lot, Alice Adair gets a good deal of satisfaction if not of actual happiness in airing her speciality, and exercising the

advice-giving power which has been ceded to her by common consent.

"May I?" she questions, as Annie walks along in resigned silence.

"Oh, certainly! I am sure you wouldn't 'interfere,' as you call it, unnecessarily with anybody about anything," Annie answers, with an air of certainty that she is far from really feeling.

"I wouldn't—you may be sure of that—unless *I* felt it to be necessary. But, Lady Galton, you may think differently; so it's at the risk of your thinking I interfere in what doesn't concern me that I shall speak——"

"If I were you, I wouldn't put myself in a false position for any one's good," Annie suggests.

"*You* wouldn't, I'm sure—it's one of the many ways in which you display tact; but I don't pretend to tact. I only know that I see more than most people, and that, though you may consider my know-

ledge of life limited, I understand better what is going on about you than you do yourself."

"I don't often trouble myself about other people's affairs, I confess," Annie laughs.

"You think you show a sort of superior tolerant indifference to social littlenesses by taking up that line?" Alice says bluntly; "and if you could isolate your influence as effectually as you do your interest in other people, it might be all very well. As it is, you influence more or less every one who comes near you—we all do it, in fact—and so you are bound to take a little more heed of your ways, and a little more note of the pleasure or pain you give others."

("I bought Hengeholme, meaning to give it to her, and so to please and help Rowley," Annie thinks; "and she treats me to an essay on careless selfishness, as a preface to a sermon on some more serious sin.")

"Now, this afternoon, see what you have done," Alice goes on fluently. "I have neither right nor wish to inquire into your relations with Rowley; but I can't help seeing that you have the power of making him very happy, or very miserable. You didn't use your power well this afternoon. You pained Rowley for the sake of pleasing a stranger—whose manner to you was not at all too respectful, I thought—and it was not well done on your part; now was it, dear Lady Galton?"

To be advised at all, to be reprimanded for her manner to a stranger, and reminded that that stranger's manner to her had not been flawless, are sharp exercises of Annie's spirit. But the absolute honesty of the one who thus presumes to point out the proper path wins her forgiveness. "I don't think that I would show another woman how to keep straight with a man I was in love with," Annie confesses to herself; but she sees that there is some-

thing almost sublime in the way in which Alice permits herself to drift into tediousness, and become a bore, for the furtherance of Rowley's comfort.

"I ought to 'look to my shining' a little more carefully, you think, Alice. Well, I'll tell you this much: I was trying this afternoon to light this young artist to a knowledge of the error of his ways. He has won the heart—or rather turned the head—of Mrs. Norris's pretty little daughter, and they're bungling the matter, and taking him for granted as her lover, though it's all as indefinite as possible. My motive in wishing to know more of him is to find out whether or not he does take her as a pleasant part of his country life and nothing more. You see, I do take an interest in what is quite outside my own life sometimes."

Alice listens attentively, and is silenced for a few moments, but not satisfied. Lady Galton has uttered a very pretty little

defence of that part of her conduct which relates to Mr. Grainger, but she has made no manner of mention of Rowley. The evasion is a marked thing. Alice is almost inclined to stigmatize it as a mean thing. For, as has been said, she has unintentionally intercepted some of those glances which Rowley has been thus lavishing upon Annie. Still, though Alice feels that she is being kept in the dark, she adheres to that course she marked out when she started by declaring that she had no reason and no right to inquire into the dowager's relations with Rowley.

"And now, having made it all clear between us, shall we join the others?" Annie pleads. She has a great esteem for Alice, and mingled with that esteem she has a feeling of a great deal being due from her to the girl whom she has superseded. But she does herself the justice of feeling that she has been very patient with her young adviser, and that not even the fact of her

having been chosen while Alice has been left by the man they both love, entitles Miss Adair to another minute of this delicious autumn day, which she (Annie) can spend so much more pleasurably by Rowley's side.

"Yes, we'll join the others," Alice says, lingeringly. It is on the tip of the girl's tongue to add, "And is this all you are going to tell me?" but she makes an effort to restrain what may have the appearance of small curiosity, and so the words remain unsaid, and Annie and Alice separate, with the fact of the former's engagement to Rowley still unacknowledged between them.

Tea is waiting for them under a large Judas tree on the lawn in front of the house. In spring this Judas tree is a mass of blood-red blossoms, without a green leaf to relieve them ; at the present moment it is an impervious bower of foliage, of a

restful, mediæval green hue. The reigning Lady Galton is there, ready to receive them, and to welcome Mr. Grainger as if she had been expecting him all day long, though she has not the remotest notion who he is. She is happy in resuming an old habit of the past days at the rectory, where they constantly indulged in these innocent, and inexpensive, and occasionally interesting Arcadian feasts. As of old, she calls Alice Adair to her side to assist her with the urn, and to dribble exactly the right quantity of milk into each visitor's cup. And Alice takes her place by Rowley's mother's side, with a frank, brave assumption of its still being her right to be there, which rouses the dowager's sympathy and admiration—for she feels sure that Alice has renounced Rowley, mentally, therefore her loving adhesion to his mother is the nobler thing.

At least the dowager makes an effort to feel admiration for conduct which she can-

not fail to perceive is admirable. But her effort is checked by the reflection that Alice will receive such a vast amount of appreciation from everybody when it becomes known that she has renounced with such a grand grace that which she could no longer retain. "While I shall be condemned a little, and wondered at a great deal, and analyzed for Rowley's benefit, until I shall indeed seem small and of no account viewed by her light," Annie thinks, rather dolefully, when the time comes for Albert and herself to go back to Hengeholme.

To his disappointment they do not offer Mr. Grainger a seat on the back of their dog-cart; for, despite that devilry of coquetry which is freely attributed to her, Annie has no desire to give Rhoda's heart (which is already on the rack) one extra twinge—and an extra twinge womanly intuition teaches her it assuredly would have, if Mr. Grainger appeared before the

Norrises to-night enveloped in that atmosphere of intimacy which is apt to be engendered by a long drive in the dying light of an autumn day. Accordingly, the brother and sister start alone, and as soon as they leave the echoes of the good-byes that are shouted after them behind them, Albert says—

“Well! Miss Adair has refused me!”

“And I have accepted Rowley!” Annie answers, not thinking it needful to proffer sympathy to her brother on account of his rejection by a girl who, in Annie’s estimation, is signally wanting in that impulsive incautiousness which in girlhood bespeaks a more generous, trusting nature, than does the habit of invariably doing the right thing at the right time and place.

“Then I bet that Alice will be sorry she said ‘no’ to me,” Albert exclaims. “I shall give her another chance, and I believe she’ll take it when once she knows fairly for certain that it’s all up with Rowley.”

Then he remembers his sister, and congratulates her heartily, for he has known well how it has been with her all along. And having done this, he detaches his mind from the romance both of her case and his own, and proceeds to regard realities.

"I'm very glad that Rowley and you have settled it, very glad, and all that sort of thing; but you'll have a deuce of a squeak to live, you know," he remarks, seriously.

"We shall be able to live as I am living now, and that will be quite sufficient for us."

"Now that's nonsense, and you mustn't be weak enough to delude yourself with the notion that you'll be able to do anything of the kind. Rowley will be able to pay his shot, and with Hengeholme at your back, of course you'll be able to pay yours; but when people marry they contemplate having a family, don't they, and where will you be then?"

Annie gives a shudder, and then explains.

"That wasn't caused by the thought of the family or its consequent cares, but by a feeling that I shall never be called upon to deal with the question practically. I ought to be happier to-night than I've ever been in my life, and instead of that, I'm more than depressed, I'm miserable. Albert, I feel as if I had done something that would bring an awful calamity upon me! What can it be?"

"Nothing worse, probably, than that you'll get sick of Rowley, or that he may get tired of you; and even if you do, you'll be safely anchored. You'll stand it, whichever way it goes; and a woman is all right, as long as she stands to a thing, you know, Annie?"

Her brother looks round at her to see if his words of kindly, worldly wisdom have had the instantaneously reassuring effect upon her that he intends them to have, and, to his surprise, she is crying.

"What *is* this?" he asks piteously. He feels himself to be very hardly used. In spite of Alice's uncompromising and unflattering rejection, Albert has been bearing himself very bravely, if not very blithely. He has stepped out of the shadow of his own disappointment, and rejoiced in his sister's joy, and spoken just such words as he feels that it behoves a brother to speak who is pleased with his sister's suitor, but not quite assured that the suit is a prudent one. And now, when he has done all this in the most praiseworthy and unselfish manner, he meets with the return of tears, when, as far as he can see, tears are absolutely uncalled for.

"What *is* this? If a woman gets what she wants, it seems to me that she's just as bitterly hurt as if she fails. If you don't mind poverty with Rowley, you surely need'nt cry about any one else minding it."

"I'm not making myself a goose about anything of that sort. I have a fearful presentiment that something horrible is coming upon me—something much worse than poverty——"

"Your nerves are out of order. Take a few doses of quinine, and you'll shake off your depression in no time. Do you think Rowley will tell them the news to-night? I wish you had been more above-board about it. If Alice had known that you and he had settled it, as I said before, I believe she would have given me a different answer; as it is, I shall stay and strike while the iron's hot, catch her heart in the rebound, and that sort of thing."

"Oh, Albert! and can you really care to catch a heart that, having been another man's, *can* rebound from him?"

"You're doing exactly the same, dear," Albert says in an aggrieved tone. "Besides, it's my belief that everybody's heart has belonged to some one else if the matter

comes to be thoroughly investigated. For my part, I've no false sentiment about it; if she comes to me in the end and sticks to me, I shan't bother my head as to who my forgotten forerunner may have been."

"The worst of it is, the forerunner is never exactly forgotten?" Annie says wearily; "and the one who supersedes is never exactly sure whether or not the superseded is not the more warmly regarded of the two; it is so natural to love and lament the lost."

"I think it's a great deal more natural to love the gained; and as for lamentations, they're not in my line," Albert says cheerily. "Don't be downhearted, dear; you've made a new move, and taken a decided step, and women are always a little nervous till they feel sure how things are going to turn out. You'll have Rowley over to-morrow, and he will laugh you out of your old womanish presentiments better than I can."

But still, in spite of this bright and encouraging prognostication, Annie sits pale and shivering till they reach the warm, safe shelter of Hengeholme.

CHAPTER VI.

A WARNING.

"STAY out here with me, will you?" Rowley says to Alice, as the dog-cart turns a corner out of sight, and Lady Galton gets up from the garden chair and moves an adjournment to the house, an invitation which Grainger takes it for granted includes himself.

She acquiesces silently, and reseats herself as quietly by his side, as if she had no prophetic instinct of the blow that is about to fall upon her.

"You had a long talk with Annie coming home; did she say anything to you about—— Will you mind my lighting this?"

He takes a cigar from his case as he speaks, and she sees that the hand that holds it is trembling. Alice's own hand is as steady as a rock; she almost feels inclined to hold it out that he may mark the contrast; but she restrains the inclination to make ostentatious display of her strength, and contents herself with saying—

“Smoke! Oh, certainly! The dowager said something to me about several things; she spoke about her desire to play the part of Providence to Mr. Grainger and a Miss Rhoda Norris. For my own part, I don't think she would be a good agent in a love affair.”

“You mean that the other side would be rather likely to fall in love with the agent, and forget the principal,” Rowley says, with an air of satisfaction in Annie's supreme charm that is rather grating to the nerves of the girl over whom that charm has triumphed.

“I mean something of that sort, I sup-

pose ; and I don't think it such an advisable or admirable thing that I should applaud it by my smiles, as you're doing, Rowley," she answers gravely. She has no petty feeling of jealousy about Annie, but intuition teaches her that the widow she thinks so thoughtless will soon be Rowley's wife, and she would like to commence giving Rowley lessons in the art of counselling, restraining, and generally managing his bride-elect. Necessity has been a stern and unkind mistress to Alice. It has compelled her to assume the reins of family government so frequently in self-defence, and for the common weal, that she has lost the fine sense of where it would be well to draw the line. She has not only been obliged to rely upon herself, but others have been obliged to rely upon her so often, that the firm, bright, brave girl is growing into the determined, dogmatic, masterful woman. And Rowley, who has watched the change, and seen it creeping

over her, shadowing the sunnier part of her nature for some time, is sorry for it, but not surprised. He is sorry for it, for he is just enough to know that he has been a developing power in this hardening process. But he is not surprised, as reason tells him that no character can remain quiescent; it must go on or go back, intensify or deteriorate. Now Alice's nature has not so much deteriorated as solidified itself under pressure of circumstances. Rowley is quite ready to admit that she is a finer character now encased in her iron-cast earnestness of purpose and intention of doing right, than she was in her salad days, when she was sufficiently green of judgment to let the latter occasionally bow to his decree. But in gaining the grandeur she has lost the grace that once was hers. She seems to Rowley to be able now to suffer and command to an extent that would make her valuable as an ally on the battle-field of life, but oppres-

sive as a helpmate in the domestic arena. Therefore when she says that she would not by her smiles applaud the course Annie contemplates pursuing with regard to Mr. Grainger and Rhoda, Annie's lover simply looks upon Miss Adair as a well-intentioned but rather disagreeable woman. And he was in love with her once! How well it would be for every girl if she could only remember, while the love delirium is at its height, that nothing lasts! How well if she could only steady her head with the reflection that the day will come when he will forget her almost entirely, and do without her with the most Christian resignation! Rowley, in the bygone days, had called Alice many a sweet and tender name, and now because she presumes to find a flaw in the woman he is loving best for the time, he pronounces her (Alice) to be colder and crueler, harder and ruder, than he deems it well a woman should be! And still he is manly enough and vain

enough to admit that what she is he has aided in making her.

"Well, we won't find fault with what Annie does or leaves undone," he says, magnanimously taking a share of the fault-finding upon himself. "I'm bound to think that whatever she does is sure to be right, for she has promised to marry me."

It is rather abrupt. He himself feels as if he had stumbled, and let the announcement of the fact tumble.

"I am glad you have been the first to tell me, Rowley ; I hope you will be as happy as—as I wish you to be."

He has been the one lover of her life ! her one idol ! the one being whose yoke she would have found it sweet to bear. She has not, like other girls, indulged in fabricating ideal men out of her brain, clothing some real life-being with the imaginary attributes, and then crying Heaven's vengeance upon that order of things which decrees that inevitably the

real shall prove stronger than the ideal, however inferior the former may be. Rowley has been her love and idol, but he has never been her hero. Indeed, she has always seen his faults with the clearest vision, and mentioned them to him with the most engaging frankness. But though he has been no hero, he has been the man whom her heart has chosen out from all the world; and as she listens now to the words which tell her that he has chosen another woman, her whole being aches dully to the consciousness that she can never rectify the mistake she has made, that she can never replenish that exhausted store of love, the contents of which she has lavished upon Rowley. Love to Alice is like life; she feels that, having laid it down once, there is an end of it. She cannot gather up the fragments that remain, and offer them to some other man. The sweetest hope that has ever illumined her tedious life lies down dead at her feet this moment,

and in addition to the agony with which she watches its death-throes, she has to suffer the smaller pang of knowing that her own family will be about her with endless comments, and suggestions, and wonderings, and futile, helpless regrets. Still, for all this, she will not add one jot to the awkwardness which it is certain that Rowley must be feeling, by any show of pain or displeasure, of pique or disappointment.

“I am glad you have been the first to tell me, Rowley; I hope that you will be as happy as—as I wish you to be.”

This is all she says, and Rowley feels that she has said quite the right thing, and by saying it has smoothed his path to the continuance of the subject which is of paramount interest to him now.

“I haven’t spoken to the mother and the girls yet,” he says. “You see, Alice, I’m not only the first who has told it to you, but you’re the first to whom I’ve told

it ; we have always been such friends that I didn't want the news to filter through any one else to you. I shan't bring Annie here, we shall live at Hengeholme ; my poor father's state makes this atmosphere too depressing for me to subject Annie to it."

" Shall you try to make him understand what you have done, Rowley ? "

" Well, just as a matter of form, I shall tell him ; but he never even seems to listen to what I say," Rowley says carelessly.

" I wouldn't, if I were you."

" Wouldn't what ? "

" Wouldn't tell him that you are going to marry Mrs. Fane's daughter," Alice says, with heightening colour. " Your father bears malice still, and—well, the knowledge can't add to his happiness, and may add to your misery."

" Oh ! nonsense," Rowley says loftily.

" I am not going about the business as if I were ashamed of it, or afraid of the con-

sequences. I shall tell my father what I am going to do, and he won't understand me——”

“He understands me *fast* enough,” Alice interrupts. “Rowley, I sometimes think that Sir Oliver knows more of what is going on than we suppose. To-day, for instance, he didn't make any remark about it, or even look interested, but his spirits fell, and his temper got worse from the moment Isabel mentioned to me in his hearing that the dowager had come.”

“He always had a pernicious habit of getting savagely ill-humoured without any cause,” Rowley answers indifferently. The truth is, Rowley's mind is so occupied with considerations as to how he can keep the woman he has won in a way that befits her when she becomes his wife, that he cannot give any particular attention to the recital of how idly ill-tempered his poor father continues to be even in his madness.

“But,” the girl urges earnestly, “*why*

need he know anything about it, Rowley? —he is not responsible. His wishes, or rather, his whims, would not weigh, and ought not to weigh, with you; why vex him by saying anything about your marriage with Mrs. Fane's daughter?"

"You're as white as a sheet, and you're shivering, Alice!" Rowley says, with sudden consideration. "Come in. Poor child, how we all overtask you, just because we happen to know that you've been overtasked by your own people all your life! Come with me while I tell my mother and the girls, won't you? and then just go and see what sort of mood Sir Oliver is in. You've given me the idea now that there is method in his madness."

"Not 'method'—malice."

"Ah, well, the one means the other with my father, worse luck!" Rowley says. Then they walk along the avenue, through the shivering autumn leaves, and across the lawn to the house.

“ ‘ God help us both, and pity us all,
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall ! ’ ”

Rowley quotes jerkily as they ascend the steps. “ I went a header before Annie, long ago, you know, and had an idea at that time of making a career, and laying at her feet the fulness of my fame, and all that sort of thing. Now it has come to this, that I’ve won the woman, and all I can give her in return for the glorious gift of herself, is an anxious heart and a disappointed ambition, and—— ”

“ Your love. She won’t be so badly off, Rowley,” Alice says, interrupting him without remorse. Is it not enough that this other should have won all, everything Alice would have prized, without having the victory undervalued ? “ And, after all, Rowley,” Alice goes on, “ it’s your love she has wanted all these years ; and so, if you give her that, she won’t give a second thought to your baffled career and your blighted ambition.”

"And instead of bringing her here in triumph to the home that ought to be hers, I shall be the recipient of all the favours. She will give me a home instead of my giving her one. It is hard, Alice, whatever you may say, damned hard!"

Rowley is not in the habit of swearing; but the composed way in which Alice accepts a sort of second-best position, both for Annie and himself, has upset his temper, and cast a shadow over the satisfaction he would otherwise feel at the successful issue of his attachment to the dowager.

Alice looks steadily and reproachfully at him. She has loved him well and long, but he is no hero to her; and she does deplore that want of self-control which manifests itself now and again in him.

"You ought to be thankful that she has been provident enough to secure such a sweet home as I hear Hengeholme is," she says quietly; "and certainly as she has

done so, there is something almost childishly inconsistent in your swearing about it."

"I don't think that being provident is a quality I value very highly in a woman: it's apt in her old age to develop into meanness," Rowley answers, coldly, as he turns into the billiard-room, where Grace is displaying her figure to great advantage while knocking the balls about with Mr. Grainger.

"Have you and Alice been having a little verbal fencing?" Grace asks, looking up laughingly at her brother as he saunters up to watch her play.

"Alice can't fence," Rowley replies; "she comes down upon you with her opinions as if they were bludgeons."

"She's dreadfully fond of setting everybody right; but I must admit that she's always justified in doing so, for she's always right herself," Grace says, addressing Grainger. She thinks that it will

sound well in his ears this tribute which she ungrudgingly pays to another girl; and it has come to this pass with Grace now that she is ready to say anything that will sound well in his ears, and do anything that will look well in his eyes. The game that she began in idleness has grown to be her very earnest purpose now. But she cannot discern from the artist's manner whether a similar change has come over his intentions. He has been always ready to meet and flatter her, but she begins to fear that the surreptitious nature of their meetings has told against her in his estimation. His manner is very soft and tender, but his words will always bear the strictest investigation. Indeed, it must be confessed that he has proved himself a more consummate flirt than the hitherto unmatched Grace; for he has kept his head, whereas she has let her heart go.

“Miss Adair must be as unpleasant as a conscience if she is always right,”

Grainger says, in answer to Grace's last remark. "She's too pretty to be infallible. There are plenty of ugly women to pursue the path of perfect rectitude. The pretty ones may err with impunity; we look in their faces and forgive them all."

"Alice *is* pretty," Grace says hesitatingly; "so Rowley thinks—don't you, Rowley?"

"Pretty! She's lovely!" the artist says, before Rowley can speak. "I'd like to paint her; but I should never fall in love with her. The woman who would have me at her feet in no time, is that Lady Galton—the dowager, as you call her."

He says it in an airy way that is infinitely displeasing to both his hearers. Grace feels virtuously indignant with Annie for the latter's being what she is, as she has already married one husband and buried him. It seems to the girl unjust that the woman should have shown herself in attractive colours to Grainger, when the latter would never have seen her at all, but

for Grace's favour. Grace cannot respond, cannot pour forth an encomium on this fascinating cousin of hers who has already won an admiring thought from the one man to whom Grace seriously inclines. "She might be contented with flirting with Rowley ; she knows she can never marry, for she's too selfish to sacrifice her income for any man," Grace thinks jealously, as she watches the light smile of admiration which plays over his face as he speaks of the woman who has won his fickle fancy for the moment. Happily for herself she is not called upon to speak, for Rowley says—

"It's only fair to tell you that we are speaking now of the lady who is going to be my wife. Don't look surprised, Grace. You know that it's no new thing on my part."

"Not surprised—only delighted," Grace says warmly, throwing down her cue and kissing her brother. "I am so glad, and

so will the others be. Does Alice know it?"

"Oh yes! and highly approves of the arrangement," Rowley says rapidly, and in some confusion. He has no desire that any one should suspect him of having played fast and loose with Alice. Unstable, wavering, procrastinating as he has been, Rowley is a gentleman, and a longing to thrash any one who may dare to think that Alice has given more love than she has gained in return, takes possession of him. "In fact, I shall leave it to Alice," he goes on, "to try and make my father understand something about it." Then he goes away, leaving the pair with the subject of love and marriage uppermost in their minds, and Grace considers the probabilities and feels very hopeful.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VILLAGE BALL.

It is a fête-day at Getley, the village that lies just beyond the borders of Galtonswear. The annual school treat is given to-day, and the youth of Getley is at its shiniest and cleanest in anticipation of taking its tea and buns in the presence of the ladies from Galtonswear, the dowager from Hengeholme, and the rector's family, in the school-room at four o'clock.

The programme of the day's amusements is a varied, full, and exciting one. After the tea has been disposed of, athletic sports, open to all comers from the village, are to take place in a field adjoining the school-

house. Special prizes for hurdle-jumping, flat race running, and steeple-chasing, are to be given by the "young squire," as Rowley is commonly called now. And an additional incentive to a display of prowess and fleetness is given by the announcement of the fact that Mr. Galton will himself initiate the running and jumping.

Getley parish church and vicarage are all in a state of unpardonable and most depressing dilapidation. The vicar, Mr. Langton, is a fine old English gentleman, with a fine old English gentleman's tastes, and the wherewithal upon which to support these tastes is wanting. He knows a horse when he sees one, and he has cornered the field too often, for him to bear the thought of riding anything but a bit of blood now, though he has fallen upon evil days. Accordingly he always has the bit of blood in his stables, and his wife and daughters pare and scrape, and live upon dry crusts and potato peelings, in order

that the noble animal may have the sweetest hay and the finest oats. Mr. Langton is quite one "of the old sort," his friends avow, with hearty admiration, and the sight of him spick and span in the hunting-field is commonly proclaimed by the villagers to be "good for sore eyes." They little know what has been endured by those at home in turning him out thus. They little reckon of the ignominious strife that rages weekly during the hunting season on account of the laundress's bill, which he condemns with a force and warmth that would lead those who knew nothing about him to suppose that he was not the one to swell it. And his "tops" are always perfect, and his flask is always well filled, and his "bit of blood" has a pedigree that challenges competition with anything in the stable of the lord-lieutenant of the county. And meantime the paper hangs in rags from his dining-room walls, and the dry-rot has

taken possession of his church, and his daughters are brooding in maiden meditation, fancy free still, because they cannot procure the requisite number of yards of tulle and tarlatan, wherein to envelope themselves at the regimental balls which take place fortnightly within sixteen miles of their secluded home. What are sixteen miles to young creatures eager for the fray, and experts at dancing? The Miss Langtons would suffer themselves to be trundled in to the garrison balls on a wheelbarrow rather than not go at all. It is rather hard on them, therefore, that the "bit of blood" should be fed upon their forlorn hopes, and have his oats at the expense of their defrauded ambition.

But to-day there is no lamentation; nothing, indeed, but a sound of joy and thanksgiving at Getley vicarage. The news of Rowley's engagement to the dowager has not been noised abroad yet, and the Miss Langtons (there are six of

them!) are determined that, in spite of his fallen fortunes, he shall fall a prey to one of them this day. They have no special feeling concerning him yet; indeed, they have only seen him once or twice at otter hunts, and lawn-tennis meetings. They look upon him as a man to be married, in a broad-minded and abstract way that does infinite credit to their understandings.

"I wish the house wasn't so horribly shabby," one of the younger girls says to the eldest sister, who is also the house-keeper of Getley vicarage.

"Men don't look at shabbiness if they like a girl," another sister chimes in encouragingly.

"Ah! but his women-folk will be at his back to point out flaws and shortcomings," the first speaker rejoins; "and that Miss Adair that all the place is talking about, who devotes herself to Sir Rowley in hopes of catching his son—don't you think she'll show him the way to seeing

how feckless we are, if he seems to like one of us? I wish we could do something to make the house look nicer before they come."

"We should just have to pull it down and begin it all over again from the beginning," the elder sister laughs. "They're not in the 'fittest' order that can be imagined themselves at Galtonswear. If Rowley Galton is what I take him to be, he'll not like a girl the less because he sees she can rough it. Now mind!—we must be 'all for one' to-day and to-night. Hetty's the youngest, she shall have the first chance with him; he'll have plenty of time to make up his mind if Hetty gets him to dance 'hands across and down the middle' with her."

"And if Hetty finds hers a failing cause, she must just tie a handkerchief round her arm, as a signal that one of the others may try her luck," another Miss Langton suggests cheerfully, and then they cast all

consideration for Rowley on one side, and go on making cakes and buttering rolls for the school-children's tea, with as hearty a zest as if the necessity of marriage, as the sole means of subsistence of which they have ever dreamt, is not before them with painful force.' Really, in spite of all this light talk of theirs about carrying Rowley with a rush, they are a band of good, well-principled, enduring girls. There is not an atom of meanness in their projected machinations. Each one of them is quite ready and willing to give any one of the others the first chance; and if the fates are against them, and chance does not favour either of them with Rowley, they will bear their discomfiture blithely, and never dream of saying a malicious word about the woman who wins him.

About three o'clock in the afternoon Getley becomes very gay. The school-children, arrayed in their bravest attire, are

lurking about in all sorts of conceivable and inconceivable places, holding themselves in readiness to respond instantly to the summons which the school-gong will by-and-by give them to tea. The Dowager Lady Galton and her brother Albert have already driven up to the vicarage, and are now being entertained by the harassed vicaress (whose mind is burdened by a doubt which has arisen as to there being a sufficient supply of buns) and three of her daughters in the unsavoury drawing-room. The three who are aiding their mamma on this occasion have mentally resigned Rowley in favour of the good-looking young City man, on every square inch of whose garments prosperity is visibly stamped. They little know that they owe his presence here to-day to the fact that he has ascertained that Alice Adair is coming with the Galtons, and to his magnanimous determination to give that young lady one more chance of happiness. Albert's heart

is not very seriously engaged, but he has a great dislike to being baulked. He is so resolved upon having Alice now, that he would like her to "name her price," and would gladly pay it, even if it were at the cost of maintaining her reckless brother Wallace, in a way that seemed good to the latter, for the remainder of his life. This being the state of the case, it may readily be conceived that the rather rough and ready Miss Langtons strike him as some of the superfluities with which, as a stern political economist, he thinks the nation might well dispense.

"Did you ever see such a beastly bear-garden in your life?" he says to his sister, as they walk away through the vicarage grounds to the school-house. "One would think that between the half-dozen daughters they might keep the drawing-room dusted."

"Poor Mrs. Langton," Annie says, with womanly sympathy for a form of suffering

that only women understand. "Do you know, Albert, when things come to such an uncomfortable pass as they have evidently come to here, the feeling must set in that it isn't worth while struggling to make the best of it any more ; they might dust away all the days of their life, and still it would all look shabby and sordid ; and he's a gentleman born and bred, and the girls might all of them be duchesses as far as tone and manner goes. Poverty is an awful thing."

"There are worse things than poverty," Albert says, with the grandly complacent manner of a man who has never tasted the delights of it. "Besides, if a fellow goes in for the luxury of a lot of daughters on nothing a year, he shouldn't bring them up to behave like duchesses. That's what I like about Alice Adair ; we know that she has had a hard life of it, and she doesn't pretend that a crumple in her rose-leaf would seriously affect her——"

"Well, I'm sure you can't say that the Langtons complain by their manner of crumples in their rose-leaves ; they deport themselves very much as if crumples were rather pleasant things. I declare, if I were a man, I should just fall in love with every one of those good-looking, well-bred girls, whose appearance refines the squalor that surrounds them. In the midst of it all they retain their birthright of grace and ease, and if they stepped into prosperity to-morrow they would be just the same as they are now, just as free, and frank, and natural ; Alice Adair would alter."

"Do you think she would ? I shouldn't like her to change a bit," Albert says seriously.

"My dear Albert, Alice would do it all in a most praiseworthy and unexceptionable way, and no one would be able to pick a hole in her conduct, or say that she didn't adorn her position, whatever it might be. She will always be prudent and pious, and her pru-

dence and piety will always serve her own ends. She is devoted to the Galtons and their interests now ; her devotion to them gives her an object in life, and makes her of importance in her own family ; but if she married a wealthy man and gained another standpoint, and importance in another way, she would let the Galtons, and all recollections of them, slide out of her memory and her life. Alice Adair is capable of doing any amount of disagreeable duty while it brings her greater notoriety and approbation than she would gain if she left it undone, and she is equally incapable of doing anything foolish. She will always be in the right place. She is essentially a safe girl."

Annie speaks clearly and firmly, but not bitterly at all. It is quite apparent that she does not love her subject ; but Albert is not in the least annoyed about it.

"I think you're about right in your judgment of her," he says. "That's just

what she is, 'safe,' and that's what a fellow like me wants. You'll have to put up with Alice as your sister-in-law. I mean to settle it to-night."

They reach the school-house as he says this, and are met by the Galtonswear party. Rowley, Grace, and Alice have walked down, leaving Isabel at home with her mother. "We had a great deal of trouble to get Alice to come," Grace explains. "Papa is extra fidgety to-day, and Alice is the only one who can soothe him. Do you know, Annie, Rowley has quite made up his mind that papa must be sent to an asylum. He has been so violent about Rowley and you."

Annie's face pales and her lips quiver.

"Why has he been told?" she asks. "He always hated me—hated me the more for having loved my mother before me. Oh, Grace! *why* did Rowley tell him?"

"Rowley didn't tell him; papa suspected

something, and questioned Alice, and it came out."

"But Alice herself advised Rowley to hold his tongue about it?" Annie argues.

"Yes; but Alice prides herself on being straightforward, you see; and so when papa pressed her to tell him what it all meant, she declares that it would have been mean and underhand to deceive him; so she told him you and Rowley were engaged, and (I must say this for her) bore all the brunt of his displeasure herself."

"You're not worrying Annie about my father, are you?" Rowley asks. "What does it matter, my darling, whether he likes it or not. I know Alice always acts for the best, but it seems to me a very unadvised thing that she should have been the one to tell Sir Oliver; but as she chose to do it, it was only fair that she *should* bear the brunt of his wrath."

"Look at the superior way in which

Alice is pouring out tea, and devoting herself to the business in hand," Grace laughs. "She always does better work than any one else, whatever the work may be; and, somehow or other, she always gains a fuller meed of applause than any one else, without seeming to seek it."

"Altogether, she's a capital type of 'the perfect woman nobly planned,'" Albert says enthusiastically. "Look, here comes our friend the artist with Rhoda Norris! Annie might just as well have saved her eloquence. She was expounding to Mrs. Norris for half an hour this morning on the impropriety of letting that fellow take the girl about in the way he does."

"I believe she runs after him," Grace pouts, looking scornfully askance at the faulty Rhoda. The latter is looking superbly picturesque and pretty to-day in a gipsy hat, wreathed with scarlet poppies. The rich, glowing redness of the poppies becomes her well, but what

becomes her better is the happiness that is diffused over her whole being, and that manifests itself in bright flush and langour-softened eyes. The girl is dangerously beautiful as she comes forward half timidly by Mr. Grainger's side. "What can he have been saying to her to make her look like this?" Grace says to herself. "It would be almost a kindness to tell the little rustic goose that men of his class say soft nothings to every pretty girl they meet."

But Rhoda has an ally in the field who will not suffer anything to be said that can annoy her. The dowager, who is always generous to other women, and who, at this special juncture, is extra sympathetic with anything like a love trouble, takes Rhoda under her wing in a way that stops all remark about the girl's having appeared upon the scene under the escort of Mr. Grainger.

"Her mother knew that I should be

here, and she knows I am always ready to take care of Rhoda," Annie says, in reply to a remark of Grace's to the effect that "she believed Mrs. Norris would willingly see her daughter compromised by Mr. Grainger's attentions, if he could afterwards be induced or badgered into offering her the reparation of marriage."

"It's lifting her out of her position, and unfitting her for the life she ought to lead, to make her your companion in the way you do, Annie," Grace remonstrates.

"We can't tell what life she may be called upon to lead," Annie argues. "Grainger is a gentleman, and I believe he is very fond of her."

"*I* believe he's a time-serving flirt," Grace says hotly. "He likes to keep in with us—with everybody, and so he just dispenses his attentions in the way that brings him in the best returns. I tell you, Annie, you are doing the girl no kindness by smoothing her path to being with him."

Look at her now! turning the cold shoulder to all the young farmers, and following Grainger about with her eyes as if she grudged his being out of her sight for a moment; she *is* making an exhibition of herself, and you'd be a truer friend to her if you reproved her for it, than you are in encouraging her."

"You're intensely interested in her," Annie says, quietly.

"*I* interested in her! Not a bit," Grace retorts.

"Then is it in him you are interested, dear?"

"Well, Annie, I don't mind telling you that ever since he first saw me at Hengeholme, he has never neglected an opportunity of seeing me again. I believe if it were not that this girl's adulation flatters his vanity, that he would overleap the class barrier between us, and ask me to marry him."

"And you care for him?" Annie asks.

"I care to be married, and I long to get away from Galtonswear. I believe there is a curse on the place." Grace shudders as she says it, and the dowager quivers sympathetically. "Besides, I am sure Mr. Grainger will make a name. Even Rowley admits that he has great talent — 'almost genius,' Rowley says, indeed; and you would see it all sacrificed at the shrine of a country bumpkin, who has nothing but a pretty face to recommend her."

"A pretty face, and a bright, clear, untainted nature," Annie says. "No, Grace, you're not in love with the man; you're only in love with the marriage, and the idea of getting away from Galtonswear — and I don't wonder at it."

The tea is over by this time, and they have all come out into the field, and the sports and pastimes are in full swing. Rhoda joins in them freely, to Grace's amusement and Grainger's delight. The

girl is as fleet of foot as a young deer, and as she "scours the plain" in company with five or six of the first-class school-girls, she illustrates the poetry of motion in a way that is very pleasing to the artistic eye.

"She is only a child still, with a child's light foot and light heart, isn't she?" Grainger says to the dowager, and she takes pleased note of the admiration he cannot conceal for the child, and whispers in reply—

"Don't you add a feather's weight to the heart if you can help it. Rhoda is very happy to-day, for some reason or other. I hope her happiness will last."

It is about eight o'clock, when the mists of evening drive them in from the field to the school-house, which has since the tea been turned into a ball-room. Desks and forms are piled up at one end in the form of a dais, on which the band, consisting of two fiddles and a flageolet, is perilously

perched. Oil lamps, wreathed with evergreens, are blazing away on the walls, and the rafters of the roof are dexterously concealed by a few old flags and boughs of laurel and laurustines.

"We must none of us dance with each other," Annie decrees. "Won't it be right, Miss Langton, that Rowley and Albert and Mr. Grainger shall dance with the village girls, and we distribute ourselves among the men?"

"Ye-es," Hetty Langton says, dubiously. Her chances of dancing are not numerous, as has been stated, and it does strike her as hard, now that when such a trio as Rowley, Albert, and Mr. Grainger are present, that she must be condemned to see them whirling the village girls round, while she herself is clutched and twisted about by a well-meaning but nervous and heavy-footed young curly-headed plough-boy. The latter uses her alternately as a supporting-post, and a buffer to break

the blows from other revolving couples, and to take the sharp edge off the various hard substances, such as forms and walls, with which they come into constant and violent collision.

"It's all very well for the dowager," the girl tells herself, with a laugh at her own discomfiture; "but if she lived at Getley all the days of her life, she wouldn't be quite so ready to relegate the gentlemen to the village girls, and plunge about herself with the men; however, it has to be done," and so with a checked sigh Hetty submits to being again clutched wildly for a few desperate minutes, as her partner uses her as a wedge to force his way through the crowd.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLANS, AND A PRESENTIMENT.

“IT will be a good day for Getley and the neighbourhood when poor old Sir Oliver goes to his rest, and Mr. Rowley and the dowager have the rule again at Galtons-weir.” This is the unanimously and gracefully given verdict. Mr. Langton is the foreman of the jury. He does not control, but he evidently directs, public opinion in Getley. He is “one of the old stock—a gentleman every inch of him, if he hasn’t a penny that he can call his own.” His parishioners are proud of him, and of his bygone extravagances, and feats of daring in the hunting-field. A bold rider, a keen

sportsman, an unerring judge of the merits of fox, otter, and greyhound, what wonder that the Rev. Decourcy Langton carries the suffrages of his parishioners with him, long after he has ceased to pay their bills. There is something very Celtic in the unction with which the tithe-payers of this English midland county village admire, applaud, and abuse their vicar. The baker (the same confiding man who lent Grace Galton his pony on one occasion) forgets the long drawn out sweetness of his bill, when his opinion is asked by the vicar, in confidence, as to the merits of some colt with a good pedigree whose beauties are kept in the dark at present in the sequestered shade of a farm-house stable. And the Getley butcher "wouldn't have it said of him" that he proffered his little account too persistently to a gentleman who has been known to preach in pink (discreetly enveloped in a black gown) when the exigencies of the Saturday's

hunting have delayed his return to Getley till the church bells were ringing the pious to prayer on Sunday morning. Unquestionably, whatever the Rev. Decourcy Langton's shortcomings in the eyes of the "uncou' wise" and the "rigidly righteous," he is a man who is popular in the neighbourhood, and well liked in his parish. And so now, when they see him pleased to stand and talk by the half-hour together to the Dowager Lady Galton, they accredit her ladyship immediately with being "one of the right sort," and hail the probability of her return to Galtonswair with pleasure.

Annie is at her best to-night, and Rowley is very proud of her, for her "best" redounds very much to the credit of the man who has won her. She throws herself with unfeigned zeal into the sports and pastimes, never seeming to care for the consequent contusions when her partner hurls her like a missile back into her place, or comes down heavily with his substantial

boot upon her foot in his well-meaning endeavours to beat and "catch" the time. She dashes into the spirit of "hands across and down the middle," with almost as much enthusiasm as animates Rhoda ; and the way in which she pursues her graceful, unperplexed way through the maddening mazes and mysteries of the Swedish dance, is a Terpsichorean triumph that will long be remembered in Getley.

"Rowley, we must do something when we're married to make the lives of those six nice girls pleasanter than they are now," she says, coming to a pause for a few moments by Rowley's side. The latter is also pausing from sheer exhaustion and breathlessness, for his partner is a stalwart young dairymaid who is considered by her compeers to be the finest "polkist" in the parish. She is very strong, very enthusiastic, and very pachydermatous ; therefore she has taken the matter of steering entirely into her own

hands—or feet, rather—and with one hand grasping his shoulder firmly, and the other clasping *his* hand as in a hot vice, she has surged right round the room several times without stopping, blows and kicks and prods from the seething mass of humanity through which she cleaves her way falling upon her with as little effect apparently as chilled shot on the sides of an iron-clad.

“Money or marriage will be the only means of ‘ameliorating their lot,’” Rowley laughs. “Do you think you’ll be able to achieve either for them?”

“I do wonder,” she says musingly, disregarding his question, “that you should have clung to me so tenaciously as you have done, when there was anything so novel and nice, so fresh and tempting, close to you as these girls are. If I were a man I wouldn’t marry myself, Rowley—I wouldn’t indeed. I’m not saying this to call forth a compliment from you; but if I were a man

I should feel that I'd rather have a wife of a more equable temperament. I'm always either uncannily sad for no obvious reason, or in a ridiculous state of exultation."

"You're very nice as you are to-night," he replies, admiringly. "You've carried the vicar's heart completely, and that's something to say for you; for the dear old fellow is as good a judge of a woman as he is of a horse."

"That's it—that's the 'exultation' of which I am speaking," she explains. "I've 'carried' him, as you call it, because I've been taking a keen, genuine, and most unaccountable and unreasonable interest in all that he has been telling me of his adventures by flood and field; and I've carried his daughters too, just because I've won their confidence, and thrown myself heartily into the task of getting hold of their loves and their hopes and pursuits. I've taken real interest in all I've done

to-night, Rowley, and in every one to whom I've talked. In fact, I'm more in love with life than I ever was, and it makes me feel fond of every living thing."

She stands before him palpitating, glowing, radiant, as she speaks; and long and deeply as he has loved and admired her, he feels as if he had never loved or admired her properly till now. As she stands, flushed by happiness and exercise, she is a splendid embodiment of the glory of life.

"No wonder that you have carried them all, my darling," he whispers, as he prepares to render himself to the lawful advances of his brawny, buxom young partner. "The 'living thing' doesn't exist that wouldn't lie down in loving submission at your feet." Then the flow of his eloquence is spasmodically arrested by a sudden and altogether masterly stroke of dancing policy on the part of his partner, who, with a brief direction to him to do the

"'op step," bounds at him, and once more drives him with vigour and determination through the ranks of his revolving fellow-creatures.

"You must be very strong," Rowley says, with as much tender interest as he can assume for a person who has caused him to receive so many bruises as have fallen to his portion during the past hour.

"Yes, Master Rowley, I am that strong in my hands as you wouldn't think" (Rowley grins; and his shoulder, which feels pulverized, twitches involuntarily); "that's why Mrs. Norris looks upon me as the best dairy hand she has; and I was wanting to ask you, sir, if you'd speak to her ladyship to keep me on when Mrs. Norris gives up the farm."

"Yes, that will be when I'm married," Rowley says graciously. "I shall take the farm into my own hands then, you know, and you shall be the queen of the dairy—

that is, unless her ladyship has promised the post to any one else."

"And I'd make my lady's butter the best known and best liked in the country, sir," the young woman goes on enthusiastically; but still, enthusiastic as she is in pursuit of her professional interests, she does not forget to claim her pound of flesh in the form of the current amusement. Even while she is securing Rowley's patronage in the matter of the dairy, she performs every possible "hop" that the exigencies of the dance demand, and takes care that her partner also shall not commit any sins of omission in that line. The temperature is very high, and by the time the dance is over and the dairy secured, she could almost take a bath in the pocket-handkerchief to which she has clung convulsively all the while. But she feels that the burden and heat has been well worth bearing, as she goes round among her friends and rivals, and tells them that she

"is to be my lady's own dairy-woman when my lady and the young squire set up house at Hengeholme."

Meanwhile Rhoda has sought the universally popular dowager, in order to bestow a confidence and to crave for comfort.

"Why, poor child! you're looking tired?" Annie says questioningly, as Rhoda comes nestling up close to her when she is taking rest and air in the school-house porch.

"So I am tired; and I wish I was at home, and I wish I had never come, your ladyship," poor Rhoda blurts out. "I had such a lovely walk over here, alone with him; and now, all along of Miss Grace's ways and artfulness, he has never come near me since the first dance."

"You mustn't speak in that way of Miss Grace," Annie says, trying to be loyal to her future sister-in-law, but feeling intensely sorry for the girl. "He's more to blame for being taken away from you, than she is

for taking him, I think. But, Rhoda, if I were you, I wouldn't think too much about him, not at any rate till you see that he thinks more about you than he does at present."

"They say you have thought a good deal of Mr. Rowley for several years," Rhoda says argumentatively; "and it isn't what they think of us that makes us care for them; it's just that we *can't help it*, and you know it as well as I do; and it's because I know you know it, that I can speak to you. And I do hate Miss Grace for her artfulness. She began her tricks on him the first time she saw him; tumbled off her pony when she was trying a jump that she couldn't sit, like a big silly." (Rhoda shows her teeth in a bright smile at this reminiscence.) "I didn't know then what she was after. But he'd always been fondest of me up to that day, and since then I've always been fondest of him."

Rhoda has been pouring her words out with so much vigour and volubility, that neither she nor her auditor have noticed the approach of Mr. Grainger. He has come up quietly, drawn to them by the beauty of the picture they make in the moonlighted porch; and Rhoda's last words fall distinctly upon his ear.

"Who's the happy fellow you've 'always been fondest of, little one, since some unrecorded day?" he asks, carelessly, as he takes Rhoda's hand and tucks it under his arm. "You must spare Rhoda to me now, Lady Galton. She always belongs to me when I want her, don't you, Rhoda? And to make up for taking her from you now, I'll put her under your charge to take home to-night."

"And I will give you the other seat on the back of the dog-cart?" the dowager replies.

"Thank you, but I go home with the Galtonswair people. Rowley has asked

me to stay there for a few days," he answers, as he swings off to a fast waltz tune with Rhoda. Annie sees that the girl's face is uplifted towards his, and that there is a desperately pleading expression in Rhoda's dark gleaming eyes and nervously quivering lips.

"Poor little girl! she's weak enough to think that a few fond words and tender reproaches will revive a man's waning fancy!" the experienced woman thinks sadly, as she watches the pair. "And even if she did revive it, would it bring her happiness? Where is comfort? I wonder what would make my perfect happiness? Rowley ought to, and does when I think only of him; but at other times 'a vague unrest, and a nameless longing, fills my breast——'"

"What are you doing out here in the dark?" Rowley says, coming out upon her suddenly. And then she tells him about Grainger and Rhoda, and reproaches him

a little for having invited the former to Galtonswear.

"I couldn't help it," Rowley explains. "Grace took me tenderly on the topic of your portrait on the panel, and when she found me sufficiently balmy, she managed to make Grainger offer to copy it, and his copying it involves his being at Galtonswear, don't you see, dear?"

"All that I see clearly is that he is a time-serving flirt," Annie says, impatiently. "I can forgive a woman who tries to smooth the social path by making herself as pleasant as she possibly can to the most influential men about her; but I can't forgive a man like Grainger trying to get and keep his footing in a house like yours, by making false love to the daughter of it."

"How do you know it's false love?" Rowley asks. He really is not very keen about it, as in his heart of hearts he regards Grace as uncommonly well able to take care of herself.

"Because I think that he carries the article about with him as a means of barter. He gives Rhoda Norris tender words and a few crumbs of hope, and in return the produce of her mother's poultry-yard, garden, and dairy is at his service," Annie says ; and as she speaks she points out the pair under discussion, who are floating by slowly and gracefully to the waltz-strains, Rhoda evidently in a state of dreamy ecstasy, and Mr. Grainger apparently perfectly well satisfied with things as they are for the moment.

"Do you think he has said anything to the girl ?" Rowley asks, remembering that he is the regent of this kingdom, and that he will be justified in letting indignation fill his soul if any strange invader presumes to trifle with one of his subjects.

Annie laughs. "Said anything ! My dear Rowley, he is an artist, and understands fully the enormous value and power of facial expression. I never saw a man

whose eyes promised more, and Rhoda, being innocent and inexperienced, responds to the mute language in words that map out the state of her heart clearly before him."

"I don't see that we can either of us do anything for them," Rowley remarks, with the air of one who deems it just as well to put a question by which cannot be settled.

"No, we can't do anything," Annie sighs. "Directly it comes to a matter of making anybody happy, our strength is proved weakness, and our good intentions the rottenest of sticks on which to have relied. I've been looking for a four-leaved shamrock all my life, Rowley, and I've never found it yet."

"You've played the 'enchantress's part' pretty well," he says affectionately.

"But I've never succeeded in reconciling friends who have been long estranged, or in warming hearts that have grown cold to others to whom they never ought to have

grown cold. I did make an attempt at securing happiness to Alice Adair, and—see how my attempt has ended! I've secured my own——”

“And mine,” he says warmly; and Annie looks at him doubtfully for a moment before she answers—

“Do forgive me, Rowley, for doubts that I can't assuage, and fears that I can't allay; as plainly as I see you now, I see that I shall be a source of such bitter woe to you that the thought of it terrifies and crushes me——”

“The only way in which you can be a source of woe to me, would be by throwing me over for some other fellow,” Rowley laughs. “I'm not much afraid of your doing it; still, to keep you out of temptation, I'll marry you next week. You shall have neither *trousseau* nor cake, nor bridesmaids, nor a bishop to marry you, nor a show wedding, as a punishment for these lively presentiments of yours.” And

her mood changing in unison with his, they go off together to waltz, and hers is again the brightest heart and the brightest face in the room.

CHAPTER IX.

“WISH ME JOY, RHODA.” .

ALICE ADAIR has herself, her emotions, and her feelings under the most marvellous control. Nevertheless, she does find it almost beyond her powers of endurance sometimes to stay on at Galtonsweir and see and hear about the preparations for Rowley's marriage. Not even to Isabel does she confess the pain that contracts her heart when she hears the endearing epithets, and witnesses the fond caresses which Rowley freely lavishes on his future bride. Isabel, out of the purest kind-heartedness, and with the best intentions possible, does not spare the friend

of her youth a single pang. Rowley and Rowley's marriage, the improvidence of it, and the mistake he has made in casting in his lot with Annie, are Isabel's themes from morning till night. She has no romance of her own on hand, accordingly she persists in bemoaning what she believes to be the blight that has fallen upon Alice. Not that she has the bad tact to bemoan it in so many words, but she does it in her manner, she suggests it in the shrug of the shoulders, and the uplifted eyebrow, and the depressed tone. Above all, she suggests it when she "*hopes*" emphatically "that Rowley will never, *never* find what a mistake he has made."

Sometimes the left, heartsore, disappointed Alice essays to strike a blow on behalf of the selected, triumphant, successful Annie.

"He will never find out that he has made a mistake, because he has not made

one, and so it's hopeless thinking that he'll repent him of it. She is very nice; she is more than nice, indeed. She's a captivating woman, and a clever one; thoughtlessness is her besetting sin, and I'm afraid she's vain," Alice says one day to Isabel.

"Thoughtlessness and vanity were the besetting sins of the daughter of Herodias," Isabel is replying sententiously, when Annie comes quickly into the room in one of her most lively moods.

"What are you saying about the daughter of Herodias?" she asks. "No scandal, I hope? I've always thought well of her, and my view of her was endorsed the other day by a brilliant American preacher, who declared that she possessed nearly every perfect womanly attribute. She was beautiful, she had brought the art of pleasing to a high pitch of perfection, she was marvellously graceful, or Herod wouldn't have been so infatuated with her dancing as to promise her anything

she asked for in return for it, and she was a loving, devoted, unselfish daughter."

"She was a bloodthirsty monster," Alice Adair says quietly.

"She was only vicariously bloodthirsty, to please her mother," Annie pleads eagerly, "and she was only *that* for a moment, and she has been all the good things I have enumerated all her life! Her worst qualities were——"

"Thoughtlessness and vanity," Alice strikes in, with the cool, calm tones of an avenging angel. "What worse qualities would you desire in a woman, Lady Galton?"

"Good gracious! I wouldn't 'desire' a woman to have any bad qualities," Annie answers apologetically; "but it seems to me that, as not one of us can be perfect, we ought to regard the minor offences rather more leniently than we do."

"Thoughtlessness and vanity are not minor offences," Alice says seriously, and Isabel chimes in—

"Indeed they are not. See what awful harm they wrought in the very case we are quoting——"

"That's a very extreme case, you know," Annie pleads. "And, after all, if her sanguinary old step-father hadn't meant it himself, he would hardly have given in to a girl's whim. But I bow to your superior judgment, and am willing to allow that a thoughtless and vain woman is a great mischief-worker, both in domestic and social life, that she is a stumbling-block to herself, her family, and friends, and a blot generally on the fair surface of the earth; but be just!—and allow that so is the ill-natured woman, so is the gossiping woman, who whispers away reputations without 'meaning any harm,' so is the scandal-loving woman, so is the meanly jealous woman, so is the self-righteous woman, and so is the hysterical woman, who is always throwing down the glove in the cause of herself or some one else!"

Annie almost pants as she raps out her denunciations of sins to which she 'is not inclined.' Alice Adair and Isabel look at each other meaningly, and then glance down from their pedestals at her with reproving pity.

"Dear Annie, do believe me," Alice says, addressing her enemy by her Christian name in her intense desire to do the right and charitable thing. "A woman may steer clear of being envious, scandalous, and malicious, and *still* she may look before she leaps, think before she speaks, and estimate herself rather humbly than otherwise."

"I can't help thinking that you have me in your mind as you speak," Annie says, with a laugh that is more deprecating than defiant. "And at the same time, though I try to fit the cap, I am quite certain that I don't think highly of myself; and I don't fancy that the words I speak in idleness injure anybody else. As for acting on

impulse, or not looking before I leap, as you phrase it, I'm afraid I must plead guilty to that charge."

"I abhor vivisection," Alice says, coldly, "and I don't think that the abominable practice is made more pleasant to me when the operator takes him or herself for a subject."

"And I abhor cold water, and won't stay to have any more thrown upon me," Annie answers, turning to leave the room. Then she stems the rising tide of anger in her breast, and holds out an olive-branch. "I came to ask if all or any of you would come over to Hengeholme and dine with me to-morrow, and before we dine, help me to come to a decision about altering the house. We mean to enlarge some of the rooms, and build a little, and we want the family's opinion about our projected changes."

She smiles freely, frankly, graciously, and includes Alice in "the family" in a

way that simultaneously touches and hurts the girl. Alice merely nods acceptance of the invitation. Isabel says—

“I am almost sorry that Rowley and you should begin extravagantly. You might almost as well settle at Galtonswear at once as begin building and making Hengeholme a big place.”

“Only, if I settled at Galtonswear at once, I should want to settle in it as I did the first time,” Annie says quietly.

“But, my dear Annie, that would be very foolish, as your circumstances would be so different,” Isabel protests.

“Very foolish indeed,” the dowager admits; “but you see, unfortunately, it’s the truth. I can lower my flag and live very happily and contentedly at Hengeholme; but if I came here I should be always marking contrasts, and that’s not a good practice for a woman to adopt, you know.”

As she speaks Rowley and his mother come into the room in animated conver-

sation. They have both been with Sir Oliver, and Sir Oliver has been perniciously sane.

"He has been talking to me quite coherently and quietly," Rowley says in a perplexed manner. "I felt almost inclined to apologize for taking care of him, till he got on the topic of our marriage, Annie."

"Did he say anything—unkind?" Annie asks hesitatingly.

"Not exactly unkind," Rowley says absently.

"Oh, my *dear* Rowley!" his mother interposes, "how wrong of you to give Annie the impression that he was at all unkind. He spoke of you quite nicely, my dear, and said if you were half as charming as your mother was when she was young, Rowley was a man to be envied. Oh yes, to be sure! Then he did say that he supposed when you came to rule here you would be for putting him away in an asylum!"

Annie shudders. "Tell him I'll never interfere about him, that I'll never come near him, that—— Oh, tell him anything you like that will make him dislike me a little less," she says imploringly.

"My darling, if my father were in possession of his senses, which he isn't," Rowley says gravely, "there would still be something undignified in your making an attempt to remove his idle prejudice against you. As it is——"

"As it is, Rowley, there is surely something undignified in your scoffing at the idea of any consideration being shown to him," says Alice, gently and firmly. She is quite aware that Rowley will almost hate her for what looks on the surface like partisanship with his father in that father's unrighteous and unreasonable crusade against Annie. But Alice, though she suffers at the thought of waking a harsh feeling about herself in Rowley, is so satisfied of her own integrity, that she runs the

risk, and dares the danger, and—wakes the harsh thought !

" I think that the less we say about my father to Annie the better," Rowley says stiffly, when Annie goes away and he finds himself alone with Alice Adair. " He can't be a pleasant subject to her, and the vein of animus that runs through all that he says about her is depressing her and making her nervous."

Alice blushes a little. She is conscious herself that it is partly on her account that Sir Oliver nourishes an evil feeling against Annie. Alice Adair has made herself very essential to the unhappy, unreasonable, ill-tempered old baronet. And she has her reward in seeing that he would infinitely prefer seeing her the wife of his son, to seeing Annie occupy that position. Good girl as she is in the main, she is human enough to feel flattered at this preference, though it is only shown by a madman. And feeling flattered, she is

grateful enough to be very tolerant to those malicious verbal onslaughts which he is apt now to make on people in general, and on the dowager in particular.

Sir Oliver has been so much better of late, that the vigilant guard which was at first maintained over him has been very much relaxed. He is now permitted to walk about the grounds, accompanied only by his wife or daughters—or, more frequently still, by Alice, with whom he holds long conversations about what he means to do “when he has let Rowley play out that whim of his of being master and ruler of the estate.” “It was the only means I could hit upon to keep him here,” he says slyly to Alice. “I knew that it would be for his ultimate good that he should be known in the county during my lifetime; so I resigned the reins into his hands, and he, aided by that horrible woman, is driving rapidly to the devil.”

“Rowley is doing marvels with the

property, and she will be a splendid wife to popularize him," Alice says stoutly.

"The indelicacy of her following him down here!—especially considering my relations with her mother," Sir Oliver goes on, following his own train of thought. "They're a pair of them!—a nice pair! I shouldn't wonder, if Fane were to die, if *she* were to come down here and insist upon my divorcing my poor wife, my poor good wife; but I'll never do it, Alice my dear. I shall show more strength of mind than Rowley did about you."

"Rowley never wronged me," Alice says in an agony, forgetting that the one whom she addresses is mad.

"Those whom God has joined together let not man (that means 'woman' also) put asunder," Sir Oliver goes on with pompous solemnity. "I've never approved of second marriages, especially when the first wife is still alive; it's hard on you, and on your children, my dear;" and Sir Oliver

falls to whimpering, while Alice, vexed and perplexed, and still amused, in spite of herself, endeavours to explain the inexplicable.

"You know I've never been married, dear Sir Oliver," she says soothingly; but he strikes his stick violently on the ground, and declares that Rowley shall not treat her so basely, that he will see her righted, and that he pities Fane for being the father of such a daughter as Annie.

Once more Alice attempts to clear away the mists of misapprehension.

"Mr. Fane has been dead a long time," she begins; but Sir Oliver interrupts her by exclaiming "that in that case he had better get back into the house, or that woman may meet him before he is prepared for her." And so, shaken by the storm his own emotions have raised, he totters back into the house, looking around him tremblingly, as if every moment he expected to see his old love approach him

like a vengeance armed with a wedding-ring.

Mr. Grainger's stay at Galtonsweir has been prolonged from days to weeks. He has made a perfect copy of a most perfect portrait of Annie, and Rowley, in his delight at this, has conceded the point to Grace of treating her friend as a welcome guest. "It is an old tale and often told." Grace, as has been seen, has been very much in earnest all along. Just at first interested motives swayed; the desire to get away from the monotony, and hopelessness of brighter days dawning, which characterizes life at Galtonsweir, did undoubtedly actuate her in the beginning. But before long another feeling intervened, and something like a real sentiment sprang up in her heart for Grainger. This sentiment, nurtured by his subtle plan of always giving it a crumb of hope to feed upon, and strengthened by jealousy of Rhoda, had grown to be a genuine thing by the

time he accepted Rowley's invitation to stay at Galtonswear. And now that that stay has extended over several weeks, Mr. Grainger begins to be uncomfortably aware that he is thinking almost as much of Grace as Grace is of him. Still, though he thinks about her a great deal, and feels annoyed if she does not bring her work and sit in the oriel window at the end of the gallery when he is painting there—still, for all this, he knows that he is not in love with her. Yet, for all this knowledge, Grace has gained an ascendancy over him. Her neat, well-laid out, carefully ordered beauty is not the beauty that appeals to his artistic eye. But he sits and looks at it with pleasure, and expresses with his eyes more pleasure than he feels, until Grace takes it all so thoroughly for granted, that out of chivalrous feeling he cannot defraud her of what she seems to consider so entirely her due. And she makes his quarters at Galtonswear so very pleasant,

and to every one she applauds his genius to the sky! No wonder that he gets into the habit of wearing the colours she fastens upon him; no wonder that he kisses the pretty hands that are forging such light, bright filigree chains about him; no wonder, above all, that he forgets the girl he left behind him at Hengeholme!

Or if he does remember Rhoda during these bright, clear winter days at Galtons-weir, it is to contrast her unfavourably with the fair, trim young being upon whom the stray winter sunbeams fall with such gorgeous effects of colour as she basks in the oriel window and works her crewels. Grace is essentially a neat-fingered girl. All the minor feminine arts and accomplishments are hers. She can embroider, stitch, hem, and sew, better than any machine that has ever been invented yet. She is white-handed, and her delicate fingers look bewitchingly pretty as she winds the silks about, and calls on Mr. Grainger for

counsel as to which colour she shall choose. Grace is a girl who will always have a delicately perfumed atmosphere about her own person. She never lacks a fair supply of the most exquisite scents, and the most daintily fine powder. Faint suggestions of the violet and the wild rose are wafted to you on the breeze as she moves about in your sphere, and sometimes a "holier odour, the odour of pansies," is borne in upon your senses. For Grace is an adept in the art of getting the utmost sweetness out of her surroundings. And so, when in her hours of idleness she roams about in the old high-walled gardens of Galtonsweir, she gathers all manner of old-world flowers and herbs, and dries them deftly, and inlays her wardrobe with them. That this skill in concentrating and utilizing the sweetest that is about her, should appeal to Grainger, and please him, and make him prefer her presence to her absence, is no proof that she does it *on purpose* to please

him, without any other end or aim? Not at all! In pleasing him thus she is pleasing herself intensely; for her there is almost as much pleasure in weaving the spell, and mixing the potion, as in seeing it work successfully.

This corridor—hung with portraits of dead and decayed Galtons, who have been in their times famous and infamous, fair and frail, good and gallant respectively, but who all, without exception, have been good-looking—seems in these days to be especially given up to Grainger and Grace. He is really working hard at his self-appointed task of copying some of the more valuable portraits that bear witness to the master hands of Sir Peter Lely and Sir Joshua Reynolds. And as she does not hinder his work, but, on the contrary, rather aids it by the gracious sweetness of her presence, he is very well pleased to have her within earshot of the softly uttered words which he is in the habit of letting fall while he is painting.

One day Grace has dressed herself in a rich, old, dead-leaf, brocaded silk saque and petticoat, which belonged to some bygone Dame Galton, and which she has found, together with a number of other quaint things, in an old cedar chest in a remote room. The stiff stateliness of the fabric, and the tender softness of its hue, suits the fair, dignified, graceful beauty of the girl whose whim it is to masquerade in it. And as she steps daintly down the corridor in old high-heeled shoes that match the dress, and that were made for the equally delicate feet of her ancestress, Grainger pauses in his work, and regards her with unqualified pleasure.

“You look like a bit of Dresden china,” he says, admiringly. “That’s your style!—a patch on your cheek, and your hair over a cushion, and your lovely arms coming out from those frills of fine old yellow lace.”

“What is the ‘time’?” she asks, patting her dress.

"Oh, it's a Charles the Second," he answers. "I tell you what, if you can find up two or three more dresses of this sort and period, I'll paint a series of Charles the Second's beauties that will run those at Hampton Court rather hard. Rhoda would be a fine Nell Gwynn, and you and Miss Adair could sit for the others."

She is delighted at the idea, and as fond as a child of "dressing up."

"There's a short-waisted, soft buff silk up in the chest, with a fine old cobweb muslin kerchief to wear with it, and a mob-cap. I'll go and put that on. It would be just the thing to sit and play the spinet in under the oriel window," she tells him, and she runs off, and presently comes arrayed in the Arcadian simplicity that was largely affected when George the Third was king.

"You may sit at the spinet and make the picture," he says, graciously; "but I'm happy to say the poor old thing is dumb."

"Heathen! Don't you like music?" Annie asks, coming into the corridor at the moment with Rowley and Rhoda, and hearing Grainger's last words.

"I am not quite sure about myself, Lady Galton. Do you?"

"I am quite sure about myself. There are just two or three voices to which I could sit and listen for ever; I ache with the pleasure they give me while they sing, and when they cease I ache with a pain that more than balances the pleasure I have felt. But when I hear instrumental music, I agree with Keats—'heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter.'"

"In fact," Grainger replies, "you'd agree with a friend of mine who was expatiating to me the other day about the delights of the opera. He wound himself up and dilated on the supreme delight it gave him to see all the lovely girls in the different boxes, flower-wreathed as to their

heads, smile-wreathed as to their faces, all of them in a state of expectancy, 'hoping for somebody' to come. And their mothers, decked in diamonds—and fat—rejoicing vicariously for their children when the somebodies did turn up; and the glow, and the warmth, and the colour, and the size of it all, and the wealth it represents,—all these made up such a picture as filled his ardent artist soul with beatific pleasure! He declared that going to the opera two or three times a week was the summit of his ambition, the climax of his desires! 'But you haven't said a word about the music yet,' I said to him; and he told me, 'Oh! he didn't mind that much now, he'd got used to it.' "

"What a barbarian!" Grace exclaims.

"Say rather what highly cultured frankness," Annie protests. "I think a man who has the courage to proclaim himself devoid of a taste that the great majority will go through excruciating torments rather

than confess they lack, is a man to know and admire."

"*I* was that man," Grainger says, laughing. "For dramatic purposes I invented the friend on the spot, as I didn't know how to express my views un lumberingly without him; but I assure you *I* was the man."

"And do you still think he was a 'barbarian,' Miss Grace?" Rhoda asks, her words pointed with jealous force, her eyes flashing with jealous fire, as she takes in every detail of the scene, and realizes by means of it the terms of intimacy which Grainger and Grace are on. Rhoda hates Grace at this moment for being "dressed up" and looking pretty. The quaint costume is an excuse for Grainger to direct all his attention to the wearer of it. And when presently he goes away with Grace to look for more old dresses in the cedar chest, Rhoda's wrath bursts forth.

"Well, my lady, if they're not engaged they ought to be," she mutters, as she turns away impatiently from the little table strewn with Grace's work and silks and book, which is drawn up close to Grainger's easel.

"They may be. Never mind, be brave," Annie is whispering, when Grainger comes back with his arms full of silks and taffetas, of old laces and brocades, and says—

"Wish me joy, Rhoda."

And the words are as the crack of doom to the girl.

CHAPTER X.

“HIS HATE CAN NEVER HARM HER.”

AFTER all, his words only mean that he calls for joy to be wished to him on account of that great find of antique garments which he has made, in concert with Grace, in the cedar chest.

“Did you ever see so many highly decorative dresses out of a theatrical wardrobe?” he goes on, addressing Rhoda, forgetting in his excitement that she has never seen a theatrical wardrobe, and consequently has not the faintest notion of its exhaustive nature. “With such properties at hand, and such dresses, we might get

up some charades and theatricals on a small scale, and get rid of the long winter evenings capitally. Shall we begin and arrange one for to-night?"

He is so enthusiastic, and enthusiasm is so catching, that they all—including Rowley, who has plenty of undone work to do to-night—fall into the plan.

"You talk as if you were going to stay on here for ever!" Rhoda takes an opportunity of muttering, as she gets near to Grainger, under pretence of examining some bilious-looking old Indian muslins he is holding up for inspection.

"Not for ever, but for some time, certainly," he answers gaily, making no secret of his intention, to her dismay, but just speaking out as if he cared little or nothing whether the whole world heard him or not, which, indeed, is the case.

"You lisp in enigmas," Grace says laughingly. "What occult words did Rhoda utter to call forth such a mysterious-

sounding answer, 'Not for ever, but for some time!'"

"She asked me if I was going to stay here for ever," Grainger says carelessly. His heart is in his work of putting the component parts of divers costumes into order, and he is regardless of the agony of confusion which is Rhoda's portion as she hears the words in which her jealous wrath manifested itself repeated, and sees the veil rudely rent from before her cherished weakness for the handsome, volatile young artistic absorbent of the deepest womanly feeling that may be found unattached in his vicinity.

"I wish *I* might answer her question," Grace murmurs, with an air of fervent feeling wrestling with maiden modesty, that would attract and please him immensely if he were not better occupied with the dresses. As it is, he does not even reward her with an approving and encouraging smile, and Grace repents her as heartily

of her ill-advised whisper as poor Rhoda does of hers. Presently, when he has reduced the chaotic mass of costumes into something like order, he turns from the two women who are interested in him to the one who is indifferent, and says—

"Lady Galton, do me a favour, and let me paint you as 'Peg Woffington.'"

"Rhoda would make a much better 'Peg' than I should," Annie says.

"No, no, she wouldn't. Peg was sweet-tempered (when she wasn't enraged), and the smile always had the best of it over the frown on her face. Rhoda reverses that order of things, don't you, Rhoda? Look at her now, scowling, absolutely scowling at me for speaking the truth."

"I'm tired of being painted by him, and I'll never be done again," Rhoda says passionately. It stabs the poor child to the heart even to hear him ask Annie to sit for him. What Rhoda's emotions would be if she could, unseen herself, watch him

through the vicissitudes of studio life for one season in town, a humane pen shrinks from portraying. Now, in the impotency of her anger at hearing him soliciting a favour from another woman (even though that woman is Annie whom she loves), which he has often solicited from her with any number of endearing words and fond caresses such as a man may bestow upon a child, she hurls an angry threat, which will not have the slightest effect upon him she feels, even as she hurls it. "I'll *never* be done again," she says with agonized emphasis; and—he does not even combat her resolution!

Rowley and Grainger fling themselves into the scheme of the projected theatricals with the fervour of boys—or rather with the fervour of men who have been considerably bored by a long series of evenings at home. It is true that Rowley of late has had plenty of legitimate employment in making himself more and more interest-

ing and agreeable to Annie. But it is also true that the most legitimate love-making palls upon one after a time. While there is uncertainty, there is an incentive to appear at one's best; but with certainty and the sense of security, monotony is apt to set in. The interests are not one and indivisible yet, as they are in matrimony, therefore self-love does not teach engaged people to exercise that same toleration for the sameness and tameness which they find conduces to their mutual comfort when they are married. It is a fact that Rowley very dearly and honourably and honestly loves the woman he has asked to marry him. It is also a fact that he prefers variety and Annie to variety and anybody else. But the day has come when common sense is more in the ascendant than it is in the earlier and more insecure hours of wooing. A woman won has naturally lost the strongest portion of her charm; being no longer unattainable,

she ought, on reasonable grounds, to be resigned to the fate which attends the majority of gathered fruits—namely, when all her sweetness has been tasted, to be cast aside.

But it has not come to this pass yet with Rowley and Annie Galton. As has been said, he does very truly, honourably, and honestly love her and like her society, but—he can bear to have the latter diluted, to share it with others. She is so very securely and entirely his own, that he rather enjoys than otherwise seeing her contribute to the common weal, and “take the shine,” as he phrases it, out of other women. The fair fabric of their love-making, in short, is founded upon such a rock, that there is no fear of its being shattered when the storms of wedded life assail it. He is so very sure of his bride-elect, that he could see her employed in the task of subjugating another man without much indignation vexing his soul.

And he is so sure of himself, that he can quite calmly contemplate the possibility of having to play in a sentimental scene with Alice Adair. "We're safely anchored," he thinks, as he reflects on the position of Annie and himself. And in his security he forgets that anchors have been known to slip.

Wallace is enabled to come down and irradiate existence for them again at this juncture—Wallace, in all the glory of his new secretaryship of six hundred a year! He is so supremely well satisfied with the position which he has attained through the grace of Albert Fane, that he patronizes his patron on the strength of it in the most debonair manner possible. He tells Fane "in confidence, and as a friend," that "his Board are a set of duffers," but "that he (Wallace) will take care they don't let the public know it;" and he kindly adds that he will take the helm into his own hands entirely, and that Fane has great reason to

be thankful for that discernment of his which prompted him to put the right man in the right place.

Altogether, Alice has great reason to be pleased and proud of her pet brother's success, and grateful to Albert Fane for having assured it. She soon gives Albert Fane a convincing proof that she is these things. For despite that never-to-be-eradicated feeling of lovingkindness for Rowley, she enters into an alliance with Fane which she declares to be founded on the highest principles of Christianity. "A friendship of the noblest sort," she calls it, and Albert is perfectly contented for a time with the terms upon which it places him, and tells Rowley that he is satisfied that it "will lead to a marriage soon."

Only Annie has her doubts about the perfect justice and equity of the arrangement, and she, having these doubts, gives her opinion when Alice asks it.

"I never offer advice, and I never

remonstrate with people," Annie says, when Alice makes a lay figure of the "friendship," and stands it up, clearly outlined, for Annie to look at; "but I shouldn't call this 'friendship,' you know; I should be honest, and call it what it is, a strong flirtation."

"You take the worldly view of it," Alice says. Alice has grown very spiritual-minded of late, if her speech is to be regarded as any criterion of her state of mind.

"Of course I do; isn't it shown to me in the light of the world? Well, I was going to add that a strong flirtation with a profound, practical fellow like Albert, is sure to lead to something more. Let me make short work of it, and hail you as my future sister at once."

"You *are* so impetuous, and you so entirely fail to grasp the feeling that actuates us—that actuates me, at any rate," Alice says. She cannot in truth quite make up

her mind to put that bar of gold, in the shape of a wedding-ring on her own finger, between Rowley and herself for ever. At the bottom of that excellently well-regulated heart of hers a disorderly hope lurks!

Wallace's opinion on the matter, when Alice insists on pointing out the beauty and holiness and general rectitude of her own conduct to him, is terse and graphic.

"You're a d—d fool not to take Fane and make an end of it," he says.

"An end of what?" Alice asks, omitting to reprove him for the vice of swearing, in her anxiety to make him explain himself unreservedly.

"An end of this hanging on to a forlorn hope. Rowley has won the prize, and—we must both make the best of it. You wanted him, and I wanted——" The young fellow checks himself abruptly, and Alice is won away from all thoughts of herself by the gloomy sadness that creeps over his face.

"Were you going to say you wanted her, dear Wallace?" she asks softly; and he puts her aside from him, not roughly, but as if he were weary.

"And I should have had her, too, if something or somebody—I don't know yet whether I have to thank a person or a circumstance for it—hadn't interfered. However, I'm going to show her that my heart is as elastic as her own, and that I can keep a wife quite as well as the ruined heir to Galtonswear can. I *know* she liked me, and when she sees me with a charming home, and a wife who's prettier and younger than herself, she may be sorry that she threw me over at the instigation of some fool."

Alice winces, remembering that she was the "fool" who had instigated the dowager to the course which separated her from Wallace, and finally threw her into Rowley's victorious way.

"Don't marry in pique, Wallace dear, and

repent in poverty," Alice pleads. "Besides, I don't *think* she ever meant more than a woman's friendship for a boy with you. She's horribly greedy of love and admiration, and as she makes no secret of being so, you're apt to think there's no harm in it—while you're with her!"

"Every one likes her," Wallace says, with morose satisfaction in the popularity of the one woman who has given him a heart-ache.

Alice concedes the point. "Yes! every one does like the dowager—every one, that is, but Sir Oliver! Sir Oliver hates her."

"Ah! but then he's mad, poor old bloke, and *his* hate can never harm her," Wallace says contemptuously; and then he turns the subject, and begins questioning his sister about "that pretty girl who comes over with the dowager."

CHAPTER XI.

“YOU DID LIKE ME?”

ROWLEY is in a state of indecision and perplexity, and, after the manner of his sex when in this strait, he takes serious counsel of every one within reach of him, and finally follows the course that he had almost determined upon following from the first. In fact, after a week's delay in family and friendly convocation, he arrives at precisely the same point from whence he started, the resolve, namely, to pursue his own course according to his own lights.

The situation has not been an extremely embarrassing one, nor has the way out of it been remarkably intricate. It is only

this. The second son of a nobleman whose political influence is almost boundless, requires cramming for six months, in order that at the end of that term he may be enabled to hobble through an examination which will qualify him to hold an office of vast importance, where his services will receive such remuneration as befits his—rank! The post of crammer is offered to Rowley, at such a salary as “no man in his senses could think of refusing.” Nevertheless, though Rowley makes this assertion regarding the offer to others with the air of a man who will deem himself highly culpable if he neglects such an opportunity, to Annie he speaks as if he did very seriously think of refusing it, “on account of his approaching marriage!”

She has listened very quietly and earnestly while he has been detailing to her all the good that may possibly—that will probably accrue to him outside and

beyond the mere money gain, from his connection with the great political nobleman, through the medium of that nobleman's ignorant and chuckle-headed son. And as she has listened she has discerned clearly in which direction his inclinations lie—in other words, she sees which way the cat jumps.

"Why should our—marriage interfere with your acceptance of this post, Rowley, if it is such a good one?" she asks quietly.

"It's not only extraordinarily good in itself, but it must lead to something still better," he replies, speaking of the scheme with a vexed air, as if, though it were a perfectly good one in itself, there was still some insuperable barrier to his carrying it out.

"Feeling this, you would be wrong indeed to hesitate. My dear Rowley, is not your career as dear to me as it is to yourself? You know it is. You know that I love to be proud as well as fond."

He takes her in his arms and kisses her. She is very dear to him, and he is very proud of her! But so is the prospect of prosperity wrung from the world by the sheer force of his own brain-power dear to him; and so is he proud of the tangible acknowledgment of his talents as a tutor which has been made in thus selecting him. Additionally, he has a keen sense of the fitness of things, and it has been borne in upon him that he can hardly, with due regard to her position and his own, either take his bride with him to the offered post, or leave her behind him.

"It would necessitate our marriage being deferred—and that, of course, is an impossibility," he says, with an attempt to speak decisively, which is marred by the ill-concealed eagerness with which he awaits her reply.

"Then let it be deferred—if it is for your present good and ultimate advancement," she says. Custom commands that if a man

proposes to delay the wedding-day, the woman, however fatal she may fear this delay may prove, must not combat his proposition. Annie concedes the point to custom now, and is rewarded by Rowley's making several faint efforts to upset the resolution he has wrung from her.

"You have only to say one word, and I'll throw the thing up, you know that, darling?" he says tenderly. "Though you're right, and though I know and they all feel that you're right in reason, still, if you have any feeling against my leaving you for this six months, I'll throw the whole thing up."

"I shall never say the word," she replies.

"I felt sure of what you would say; I knew you'd be sensible about it. It's awfully hard, of course, just as we thought everything was settled, but out of the evil this much good will come—Hengeholme will be in better order for our reception by

that time than it could be if we hurried things on at the pace we have been going for the last few weeks. We shall have time to build the theatre—not but what I'd go into it before the bricklayers have done their part rather than leave you."

"Then why do you—why not take me with you?" Annie thinks; but she only says—

"I am afraid all these charades and private theatricals do more harm than good, Rowley. Wallace Adair seems to me to be availing himself of dramatic license to make very unmistakable love to Rhoda Norris."

"And why should you care for that?" Rowley asks jealously, for he has not forgotten those past passages in Wallace's intercourse with the dowager which have been already narrated.

"I only care for the girl's sake; she has had one sharp experience of the misery of letting her heart go out to a man above

her in station. I'm really afraid that she responds with more injudicious warmth than she would otherwise show to Wallace Adair, for the sake of showing Grainger that she has got over her weakness for him——"

"One nail always knocks out another with girls of Rhoda's stamp," Rowley says carelessly. Then he turns the subject, and projects further alterations at Hengeholme, which she can amuse herself in superintending during the six months of that absence of his—which she has counselled!

"And I shouldn't wonder if by that time Albert will have persuaded his Alice to marry him, and we can have a double wedding," Rowley says; and Annie answers—

"It seems to me that Alice, with her assumption of superior goodness and desire to do what is right, is simply playing a mean part. She is keeping

Albert dangling on, while she herself remains in the position of its being perfectly justifiable for her either to take him or leave him finally. She told me yesterday that she knew that 'eventually the decision of such an important matter would be taken out of her hands, and that she would be "guided" to do what was best.' I have no sort of patience with the piety that is used as a cloke to cover the steps people take towards putting themselves in the best place, regardless of the feelings of others. I hate the cant that calls itself Christian caution.' I would rather see my brother married to a girl full of generous failings, than to one who will always walk warily, and get herself held blameless whatever befalls other people, like Alice Adair."

"I must say this for Alice, that she has never spoken half so harshly of you as you are now speaking of her," Rowley says, with that manly toleration towards

an absent woman which is one of the most severe trials to which a present woman who dislikes the absent one can be subjected.

"Please, Rowley, spare me the recital of her well-regulated generosity. Caution marks the guarded way with her so strongly, that I don't believe she would say a word that wouldn't bear the strictest investigation against a mad dog that had bitten her, while she retained her reason. August her deed, and sacred be her fame! I can esteem Alice's excellent qualities—at a distance; but when I am near I can't sympathize with them."

"Neither can I now. She's altered awfully from my boyhood's dream," Rowley laughs. "How they'll get on without her at Galtonsweir when Albert does take her off, I can't imagine for she's got such sway over my father that she's as good as a couple of keepers."

"Ah! and some day he will turn and

mistake her for some one he hates, and brain her in his madness," Annie says, shivering. "Oh, Rowley! oh, Rowley! I *wish* you weren't going to leave me; but that's an idle wish, and you're not to attend to it, and——"

"Everything is for the best, my own darling," Rowley says, raining kisses on the wistful face that is raised in pleading for—she knows not what—to his. And Annie has to seem to accept his dictum with pleased acquiescence.

It is some week or two after this that the Dowager Lady Galton and Rhoda Norris are walking in one of the garden paths that is the furthest removed from the house. Hengeholme cannot justly be described as a peaceful or pleasant residence in these days. The metallic thud of the bricklayer's trowel, and the scraping sound of saw and plane and chisel, and the noise of hammer and

mallet, are never-ceasing. "The result will be to make us very beautiful in the eyes of our neighbours," Annie writes to the absent Rowley—who, though absent, is laudably anxious to be kept posted up in the way in which the work which is perfecting his future home proceeds. *His* future home emphatically, not the home Annie is going to give him; for with a woman's delicate sense of its being better that the man should be the more largely endowed of the two who enter into a matrimonial arrangement, she has already presented Hengeholmé and the lands appertaining to it, to the heir of Galtons-weir.

The atmosphere is dark and chilly to-day; the neighbourhood of the running water, that is so pleasant in spring and summer, when the lime trees are in leaf and bloom, is almost repulsive now. Annie is reminded of Shelley's lines, and quotes them :

"Between the time of the wind and the snow
All loathliest weeds began to grow,
Whose coarse leaves were splash'd with many a speck,
Like the water-snake's belly and the toad's back.

"And plants at whose name the verse feels loath,
Fill'd the place with a monstrous undergrowth ;
Richly and pulpous, and blistering and blue,
Livid, and starr'd with a lurid dew.

"And agarics and fungi, with mildew and mould,
Started like mist from the wet ground cold ;
Pale, fleshy, as if the decaying dead
With a spirit of growth had been animated."

"What a damp, depressing, clammy
kind of poem!" Rhoda cries, as her
companion pauses. "Is it your own?—
have you made it up about this place,
now?"

"My own!" Annie ejaculates, striving
to keep down the feeling of righteous
wrath which assails us, when some words
we would have given our lives to have
written, are quietly assigned to us by
some one who sees in them no more
beauty, and mystery, and the sweet pain

of poetry, than is to be seen in "Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle."

"My own! No, Rhoda, I am not the angel Israfel, nor a second Shelley. If the din in the house were not so deafening, I'd make you go in at once and read the whole of that poem; and the first part of it would bring a garden in its sweet summer beauty and fairest summer fragrance so vividly before you, that you would forget the 'clammy' after-part (that word was well used, Rhoda) and this equally clammy scene."

"I'm not much for poetry," Rhoda says, honestly. "Mr. Grainger used often to say verses to me, but they were all love verses, and I understood them well enough. He says them to Miss Grace, I suppose, now."

She speaks in a half contemptuous, half amused way, as a girl might speak whose vanity more than her heart is touched by a man's defection.

"Perhaps so," the dowager replies.

"Time's power isn't to be disputed, Rhoda. I find that everything and everybody, including myself, changes, and *all* the changes can't be for what each individual thinks the better, you know ; and I think, after all, you only liked Mr. Grainger best because he was very much in your way to be liked, and he was nicer in every way than any one else you knew."

"That's what we most of us like some one best for, isn't it, my lady?" Rhoda asks innocently. "What do you like Mr. Rowley for if it isn't for that? He's the 'best' in your eyes, and he was in your way for you to see it, and you haven't seen any one who can put him in the second place with you."

"Have you seen any one who has put Mr. Grainger in the second place with you?" Annie asks keenly. "Come, Rhoda, tell me. You know how glad I should be if it was any one who would make you happy."

"That no one can tell but myself, my lady," Rhoda says, laughing and blushing. "But I will tell you that I am not going to trouble about Mr. Grainger any more, and Miss Grace is welcome to him for all I care about it; if she likes to be an artist's wife and have her husband always running about after every pretty girl he sees for the sake of 'a fresh model,' as he calls it, she may. I wouldn't stand it—no, not for a dozen, nor a hundred Mr. Graingers; and I think Mr. Wallace Adair worth Mr. Grainger twice over; he's softer mannered like, and more gentlemanly——" She comes to an abrupt pause, for there, ahead of them, lounging along in his pliant, lazy way, comes Wallace Adair himself; and Rhoda's scarlet cheeks and dancing eyes betray that the sight of him is pleasant to her, and that she thinks that she is the object he is seeking.

It is rather damping to her ardour, therefore, when he comes up to them, to hear

him tell the dowager that he has come over to have a few words on business with her alone. He takes the sharpest part of the sting out of his request by adding, for Rhoda's benefit, that "Lady Galton must be aware that he owes much to her brother's influence." As he at the same time considerably bestows a languishing look and a gentle pressure of the hand upon the girl, she goes off in a moderate state of contentment when the dowager says—

"Will you leave us, Rhoda, as Mr. Adair has business with me? I shall soon come in; the house is pleasanter than the garden on such a raw day as this. And will you cut some sprigs of holly and put them in the drawing-room vases for me, and tell them in the house that Mr. Adair will dine with me—for you will stay, won't you?" she adds, turning to the young fellow, who is watching Rhoda's varying face intently.

"If you repeat your invitation after we

have had our talk, I'll stay," he says, as soon as Rhoda has left them ; and Annie laughs and tells him that their discussion is not likely to be a sufficiently serious one to put all thoughts of dinner out of their heads.

He has come over to-day intending to reproach her with her conduct to himself, and to tell her that he has transferred the love he had for her once to another woman. And now that he is alone with her, and with nothing to hinder him from speaking, he does not know how to begin. He cannot revile her for a "changed manner," for her manner to him is just as brightly, warmly cordial as it has ever been. Moreover, she is looking just as it pleases his taste to see a woman look, in her velvet robe and hat of olive green, and it is so very hard for Wallace Adair to find fault with anything that pleases his taste, however pernicious that thing may

be to him. Still, he reminds himself that he has something to reproach her with; and so, after a few introductory remarks that, after the manner of introductory remarks, have nothing whatever to do with the subject to be introduced, he says—

“Do I owe the appointment I hold now, through Fane’s influence, to *my* sister, or to *his* sister, Lady Galton?”

“Unquestionably not to me,” Annie replies. “Don’t you believe in your own merits sufficiently to take it for granted that it may be to them?”

“No, I don’t! I’m very vain, I admit, but in this case my vanity takes the line of preferring to believe that I owe my advancement to the interest taken in me by a woman who loves me.”

Her colour rises at his words, but—she reminds herself that not so very long ago she did give him good reason to believe that she liked him well, and so she keeps silent.

"Remember, I am speaking of my sister," he says presently. "There can be no reproach to her in taking it for granted that she had sufficient care for me to get me a good thing when it came in her way to get it, can there?"

"There can be none, indeed; nor could there be any reproach to me if *my* deed had been equal to my will, and I *had* been the one to serve you, Wallace; but I didn't know my brother's power until he had done what I would have had him do for you."

"You were always my friend, you always wished me well," he says, in a tone of subdued, grateful recognition, that is due partly to his recollection of the past, and even more to his hopes of what the future may bring him.

"Indeed I did," she answers. "I not only always wished well for you, but prophesied well for you; and you see my prophecy has come true! You're a suc-

cessful, rising man, and you're young and unhampered, and the world is all before you, and—— Oh, how often I've wished to be a man in the same case as you're in now!"

She sobers away into down-hearted, dejected earnestness as she speaks; but Wallace, who has his own interests well in view, disregards the manner, and sticks closely to the matter of her speech.

"You think, then, that your brother will see that the right thing is done for me, and that I am not unfairly shoved on one side?" he questions eagerly. "I don't mind telling you, but there's a lot of backstairs work and nefarious dealing going on in the shop I'm in, and I know a little too much to please the direction; so, unless Fane stands up straight for me, they'll be trying to get rid of me."

"Ah, this is 'business,' and you must talk it with Albert, not with me——"

"But a word from you sometimes, to him?" Wallace interrupts.

"My dear boy, you shall have a word, or a thousand good words from me; but I will not be mixed up in business intrigue. I will speak of you as I think of you, as a clever, energetic, bright-minded young fellow! Business men (and my brother Albert is a business man) will deal with you as they find you; with their view of you I will never interfere, but I shall always like you, and always feel interested in you."

She looks at him for at least an answering glance of kindness as she speaks, and—he does not give it to her.

"Shall we go in, Wallace?" she asks softly. "You look weary and cold; let us go in to one of Mrs. Norris's cheering wood-fires."

"I *am* weary and cold. I've walked all the way from Galtonswear to ask you one question, and now I'm here you make me feel that I have no right to ask it."

She knows him to be selfish to the very

marrow of his bones, but—if she does not teach herself to regard selfishness leniently, where will Rowley be in her estimation very soon? So she trains herself down to say, with a fair amount of kindly interest—

“Ask your question, Wallace, you know that I will answer you truthfully.”

“That’s all I want!” he exclaims, as earnestly as if it were possible for her to suppose that he could want more. “I only want you to tell me one thing. You did like me? Now didn’t you?”

“I did, and I do very, very much indeed.” Annie has not the faintest feeling of hesitation about answering this question. Never in her life has she faltered at proclaiming a liking if she has felt it. On the other hand, it must be confessed that she has frequently perjured herself by denying a dislike which, well grounded in her own mind as it might seem to be, has had an air of being baseless to others. But to repudiate a liking has always been beyond

her. Indiscreet as she may be, she cannot be mean. So now, with genuine flattering warmth, she responds to the question of the young fellow by her side with the words—

"I did, and I do very, very much indeed."

"There, now!" Wallace exclaims, with boyish petulance; "it's almost cruel of you to tell me this now, when the whole thing has been made a mess of by other people's interference; and yet it would have been more cruel if you had said no. I felt sure that you knew what you were doing, though Alice declared you meant nothing by it; but you did see how it was with me, and you were willing that it should be so, now weren't you? You did mean to lead me on, didn't you?"

"Do you think there is either use or wisdom, or pleasure, as far as that goes, in our talking in this way?" she says, in a low voice. She is paying the born

coquette's customary penalty. She is being compelled to confess that she has given the encouragement which she now regrets, and that however weak the love which has been lavished upon her, she has taken some trouble to win it. This boy's romantic adoration for her had been very sweet, and while tasting its sweetness she had not perplexed herself by questioning how it would end. The real vein of feeling for Rowley, which has run through her life, has never stagnated in reality. But she realizes that "seeming" has been considerably against her, as Wallace now pleads strongly for the acknowledgment that his love was neither unwelcome nor in vain.

"I *know* there's neither use nor wisdom in crying over spilt milk," he says gloomily ; "but there is a certain amount of pleasure to a fellow in finding out that he wasn't being made a fool of *all* the time. You don't know what harm you may have done,

Lady Galton, by taking me up and letting me down in the way you have ; I'm just the kind of fellow to go and do something desperate."

"Before you do it, let us dine," Annie says, demurely ; and it pleases her to see Wallace's face, which had been so gloomy a moment before, gleam with appreciation of this bathos.

It gleams with appreciation of something else presently, and that is the dowager's invitation to Rhoda to join them at dinner. As for the girl, she is in a glow of delight, partly at the unexpected honour, and partly at the dawning of a hope that "Mr. Grainger will soon see that she is not wearing the willow for him, and that other people admire her though he got tired of her."

Wallace does admire her, and does make a great demonstration of his admiration, and this not so much because he finds it impossible to conceal his feelings, as

because he hopes that the woman "who had taken him up and let him down rather roughly," may experience something like a pang of regret, or a spasm of envy, when she sees that he has transferred what he calls his "heart" to some one else. Wallace is a very agreeable, attractive young fellow, but generosity about matters connected with the tender passion is not his strong point. His parting words to the woman for whom he has been wearing his heart on his sleeve prove this.

"I can't understand Rowley's slogging away at tutoring up in town alone, when he might be down here living the life of a country gentleman with you?" he says.

"It's but for a short time. He will make a great deal of money by it; and as you know, Wallace, money is essential to our well-being in these days," Annie answers lightly.

"Well, I know *I'd* make any money sacrifice to be with a woman I loved,"

Wallace says munificently; and Annie laughs and tells him that she believes he will always "be with a woman he loves, for his love will be given to so many, that one of them will always be near him."

CHAPTER XII.

THE AVENGING ANGEL.

THE six months of Rowley's definitely agreed upon absence have just expired, and Hengeholme is in perfect order for the reception of its master. After all, Annie is fain to confess that they have not been such weary months in reality as they had been in anticipation. Under her culturing eye and hand the house and gardens have assumed so fair an aspect, that Rowley will be difficult to please indeed if he does not hail the exchange he is making from Galtonsweir to this smaller but far lovelier home. The old-world character of the garden has been maintained, and instead

of the modern bedding-out arrangements, which are abominable in the eyes of the true lovers of the real old English garden, masses of old-fashioned flowers greet the senses agreeably on every side. Tall clusters of the pure and stately lily of our lady, crimson compact masses of love-lies-bleeding, richly hued sweet-williams, long straggling trails of honeysuckle, wreaths of snowy, feathery clematis—

“ And the jessamine faint, and the sweet tuberose,
The sweetest flower for scent that blows,
And all rare blossoms from every clime
Grew in that garden in perfect prime.”

Perhaps it is the effect of the sunshine that is flooding everything with waves of golden glory ; perhaps it is due to the delicate odours that are wafted about her with every breath of wind as she drives along the carriage-road between the wide flower-filled borders ; perhaps it is because Rowley is coming home to-day ; or perhaps it is that the mysterious sense which,

for want of a better name, we call "intuition," is telling her that all her troubles are nearly at an end now ;—but at any rate Annie is superbly happy this day, as she drives over to Galtonsweir to be ready to greet her lover when he arrives in the midst of his kith and kin.

Matters have marched ahead considerably during these six months with some of the *dramatis personæ* of this little serio-comedy. Grace and Mr. Grainger have "engaged" themselves to one another, have been very much applauded for what they have done by all whom their deeds does and does not concern, and are now trying the effect of the cleansing fire of separation upon their love, while the gentleman pursues his Art studies in a studio in Rome.

And Wallace Adair has married Rhoda—married her in haste, and not even taken decent leisure to repent him of his deed. He is one of those constituted men to

whom it is possible to be at the same time passionately in love with a woman, and sullenly vindictive against her. It has been for the sake of paining Annie—against whom he has a grievance, that, being a purely imaginary one, naturally grows stronger every day—that he has seemed to warmly woo, and proudly win Rhoda. He has vaunted the girl's vivid beauty, and vigorous youthful charm, with a fervour that he feels *ought* to pain and sting the other woman whose beauty is less vivid, and whose youth is over. For the sake of giving Annie a pang he has sought Rhoda with almost fierce ardour. And when the girl, won by his passionate, earnest seeming, has let her heart and soul leap out to him in response; when he has perfectly subjected her hitherto defiant, untamable nature to his, and she with humble gladness has not only accepted the boon of his love, but gladly grasped at it; when he has, as he hopes,

put the crowning brick on that Temple of Triumph he is erecting over Annie by marrying Rhoda; then the bloodless, nerveless nature of his regard shows itself, in its true form, to the wife who, bounded in by his callous indifference on every side, realizes the unpalatable truth that she has in fact as little power to pain as to please him.

Alice has been a very sympathetic sister to Wallace in all the disagreeables which have concentrated themselves into one stream, for the purpose of pouring themselves with fine volume and force upon his unlucky head since his marriage. She has discovered so many extenuating circumstances to be urged on his behalf, that it would indeed be marvellous should she ever excavate another for the benefit of any other of her fellow-creatures. And she has done her rigid sister-in-lawly duty by Rhoda. No human being, however well disposed to carp that human being

may be, can aver that Alice has shrank from speaking frankly to Rhoda about her faults, and generally striven to instruct Wallace's wife in a full sense of her own unworthiness.

That Alice should be still a great deal at Galtonswair is a circumstance at which no reasonable person ought to cavil, for no one can say now that she is trying to "catch the heir," in the face of the heir's widely proclaimed engagement to Annie Galton. The real and the avowed cause of her presence here is one that redounds to her credit in every way. Under her soothing influence Sir Oliver has grown mild and harmless. That he is mild and harmless in a sullen, silent way that would be infinitely distressing to any one in whom his "moods" evoked a tender interest rather than one of terror, is nothing to the point. No one *has* a tender interest in Sir Oliver. Even his wife is perfectly well contented that he should remain in a con-

dition in which he is powerless to nag and snarl at, worry and generally distress and annoy her, provided that so long as he is in this condition he receives every care and attention, and is surrounded by all the circumstances that can alleviate it. When poor Lady Galton knows that Alice Adair is with him, her conscience is not only at rest, but it absolutely slumbers. The girl whom he had disliked and distrusted and despised in the old days when he feared his son might marry her, has become very dear to him, in a cloudy, obscure way, now that Rowley has chosen another woman. He does not say much to his gentle keeper, but he sits and watches her looks, and tries to gather from her expression what it will please her that he shall do. So gradually it has come to pass that the restraint under which Sir Rowley has been placed has been relaxed till it is merely nominal, and the care of him is now almost solely relegated to Alice.

The unnamed, undefinable bond between Alice and Albert Fane is still in existence. That is to say, to his sister's ill-disguised disgust and dread, Albert still waits on hopefully but anxiously for the day to dawn on which Alice will feel justified in coming to a decision. Up to the present she can neither make up her mind to say him yea or nay for good and all. But she puts the delay in such a prudential, not to say pious, light before him, that he either has no appeal, or is afraid that if he makes one it will be summarily and finally rejected. Alice tells him, with the most praiseworthy and honourable candour, that he must know that her affections, having been given to some one else at one time, are much too precious commodities to be transferred to any one else until she is thoroughly assured herself of their being in a perfect state of restoration. And Albert, who at the outset had so valiantly declared that she would have

“to take him or leave him without delay,” accepts her procrastination because he can get nothing more satisfactory, and waits supinely for a woman whose greatest charm for him (if he troubles himself to analyze his own motives, which he does not) is that she keeps him waiting!

But Annie's thoughts as she drives along to-day are not busy with Wallace's matrimonial miseries, or Albert's deferred hopes. She is thinking of the speedy realization of her own happiness, of Rowley's immediate return, and of the smiling welcome that is awaiting him in the home she has made and beautified for him. The farm lands around Hengeholme are laughing with the harvest that is ripening for him to gather in; the herds of sheep and oxen are glossy with marrow and fatness; and the dairy, under the auspices of the buxom beauty who had secured her own preferment at the school-treat ball, has become a model for every grace and charm

that a dairy ought to possess. She looks back at the house as she turns on to the high-road over the common, and sees it lying there with the purple shade of a big flowering clematis and a late blooming wisteria upon it, and all its fair garden ground in well-kempt beauty around it, and her heart swells with happy, joyful pride at the thought of how ready she and the home both are for Rowley.

She is a very welcome guest at Galtonswear in these days, for she not only spends her income gloriously whilst she has it, in endowing the girls with everything they want, but she has employed a large portion of it in renovating what has gone to seed both in the Galtonswear house and grounds. It has been so pleasant to her to be the means of replacing, and repairing, and reinstating so many things and persons that have been overlong left unrepaired and unreplaced there. Thanks to the golden ointment which she has spread freely,

service is once again properly rendered to the ladies of Galtonswear, and if the grounds are no longer the models of horticultural splendour and neatness which they were under her own *régime*, it must at least be confessed that they yield plentiful supplies of the finest fruits and fairest flowers.

"In fact," Grace says, honestly enough, when discussing the subject with any one to whom she feels she may dare to unburden herself, "inconsiderate as it may appear to Annie, one can't really help wishing that stern duty would chain Rowley twelve months longer at least away from matrimony; while she is a widow she has plenty of money to spend, and it is her greatest pleasure to spend it on us and on Galtonswear. Of course it's generous in a way, on her part, but we must be just and not put her on too lofty a pedestal for her conduct. After all, it's only a form of selfishness; it's her greatest pleasure to do

so, and she gratifies herself by doing what gives herself the greatest pleasure, and I love her for the hearty, joyous way she does it. *She* doesn't go about with an air of deprecating thanks, but at the same time thinking you heartless worldlings if you don't proffer them."

"That's a side-cut at Alice," Isabel remonstrates, "and it isn't fair. The sacrifices she makes for us are, after all, not nearly so pleasant and picturesque as those that Annie makes for love of Rowley."

"I am not sure that what the other one does isn't done for 'love of Rowley,' too," Grace laughs. "You see, Rowley isn't married yet, and nothing is certain in this transitory life until it's accomplished. If Rowley ever thinks about Alice at all (which I doubt) he ought to be touched by that devotion to him which has taught her to be papa's slave and master; but you'll see it won't last after Rowley and Annie are married, or, if it lasts, it won't work pleasantly."

"Alice will never come between husband and wife," Isabel says, with virtuous warmth on behalf of her friend.

"Never, in a way that can call down condemnation on her own head; I know that as well as you do. If Annie ever protests, she'll be put in the wrong place. But she'll never 'protest'; she may blaze out one day, but at the worst she'll only burn herself, and not even scorch the other one."

"You misunderstand Alice," Isabel says coldly. "Few natures are capable of quite understanding the higher feeling that actuates her with regard to Rowley. I believe she feels that their spirits are united."

"You're talking what sounds to my profane ears like horrible immorality," Grace interrupts warmly. "If she feels any folly of the sort she ought to get herself out of the way before Rowley comes back. Spirits united! I shouldn't like to know

that any girl imagined she was united in spirit to Arthur Grainger. I'd infinitely rather that a man I cared for fell over head and ears in love with a lovely face, because that's only natural and manly, than that he professed devotion to her soul; there's no tangible grievance to get hold of in the latter case. If Alice fancies herself united to him in spirit she has no right to go to his wedding with Annie, and if he responds to Alice's folly he ought to feel as if he were committing bigamy."

"I think that ought to be Annie's feeling," Isabel says. "For all her brightness and fascination, and generosity and other good qualities, I can never look upon Annie as anything but a very culpable woman. To me there is something wicked in the idea of a woman marrying a second time——"

"Oh, I don't see that at all, if the first husband is dead," Grace says coolly, conveying the impression to her sister that

she would look with leniency upon the venial error of a woman's marrying a second time even while her first husband was alive.

"What idle words you utter, Grace! Speaking lightly of such a deadly sin is a sin in itself."

"And how you do strain at straws," Grace retorts. "You drive me into an irreverent frame of mind by the way you condemn Annie as being wicked because she is going to offend one of your prejudices and marry again; and you swallow the camel of impropriety of which Alice Adair is guilty in talking about a 'spirit union' between herself and a man who's on the brink of marriage with some one else. Really 'rigidly righteous, and unco' guid' people do a vast deal of harm in the way of making weaker vessels drift over the border out of defiance."

"The motives of a saint in heaven couldn't be purer than Alice's are," Isabel

says, with the air of solemnity one is apt to bring to bear upon dead or religiously disagreeable people who are being dissected for the edification of "weaker vessels."

"I think, being only human, she isn't quite sure of what her own motives are," Grace replies. "She would be shocked if she thought that the whole course of her conduct has been calculated to put Annie's in a bad light. Alice, who is not one of us, and who, on the surface, has nothing to gain by it, devotes herself to papa, and leads a life of hideous monotony with unvarying readiness and cheerfulness. While Annie, who *is* one of us, and who, perhaps, some people may think, might show a little interest in her future husband's father, avoids papa's presence, and can hardly constrain herself to say a kind word to the poor old man when she does see him. Yet, for all that, no one can think for a minute that there's a taint of malice or

meanness in anything Annie does. But I won't say a word more about her, for I find when I praise her most, according to my own idea, I damage her most with other people."

"Because you praise her charming faults," Isabel says, "and *some* other people are clear-headed enough to know that even if they are 'charming,' they are faults all the same."

"Whatever comes to her she'll not have too happy a life. Poetical justice will be satisfied, and the erring Annie will pay for her peccadilloes, whatever they may be, in bitterness here below, I'm afraid," Grace says impatiently. "She loves Rowley, and it will cut her to the heart to see him annoyed with her ; yet, being what she is, she'll annoy him perpetually, and wound his *amour-propre*, and make him feel that she too keenly appreciates all that is to be appreciated in other men ; and Alice Adair will spread her superior wings over them,

and try to teach Rowley to be 'tolerant to the well-meaning but thoughtless wife he has married.' And, oh, don't I know well how professedly good women can sting and goad others who don't profess into making mistakes !”

“ If Annie makes a 'mistake' she'll do it because she's inclined to do it, and not because any one 'goads' her,” Isabel says ; and Grace answers—damaging the cause she strives to serve by her words—

“ Yes, I believe you are right. Her anxious friends may take a ticket for her to go to the devil, but unless she has made up her mind to go the ticket will be wasted.”

Annie reaches Galtonsweir about four o'clock this afternoon, and Rowley is to arrive in time for a seven o'clock dinner. Everything looks bright and prosperous, and even “ Sir Oliver is more like himself than he has been for many a long month,”

Lady Galton tells them when she comes out to join them at afternoon tea, and greets her future daughter with all the tender love and pride that really fills her heart to overflowing concerning Annie.

"Does Sir Oliver know Rowley is coming home to-night?" Annie asks.

"Yes—he knows it!" Lady Galton replies, with a degree of embarrassment in her manner that shows Annie that he has said something disagreeable about it.

"Does he know that we are to be married directly? Does he understand *that*?"

"He—muddles up things a little, you know," Lady Galton says, apologetically.

"Do tell me what he has muddled up?" Annie says, coaxingly.

"Well, my dear, Alice was telling him this morning, in her pretty, gentle way, that his son was coming home, and at first he seemed to think that Rowley was a boy again, and that he was coming home from

school; and when Alice explained that Rowley was coming home to be married, Sir Oliver kissed her and blessed her, and said he was glad indeed that she was going to be his daughter; and then she had to tell him, of course, that it was you——”

Poor Lady Galton pauses, and looks imploringly at Annie, with an expression that says plainly, “Pray let me out of the witness-box;” but Annie disregards it.

“She had to tell him, of course, that it was me. And then?” she questions, remorselessly.

“Then it all seemed to come back upon him. You know, my dear, he has never got over being disappointed by your mother in early life, and though I’ve tried my utmost, *I’m sure*,” the poor, good-hearted, humble-minded lady continues earnestly, “I’ve never made up to him for it, I suppose. But we won’t talk about disagreeable things,” she goes on, with an

hysterically weak effort at hilarity; "you'll be seeing Rowley in an hour or two, and he'll make you forget everything but the happiness that is before you."

"It's been a long time coming, but I believe that it is going to be perfect happiness at last," Annie says, kindling at the thought of Rowley's return as warmly as if she were still the young girl whose heart he won at Trouville. "Poor dear Sir Oliver! if he could only see mamma now, and know how she nourishes foolish fancies about young men like Mr. Cairn, he would forgive her fast enough for having played him false." Then they get themselves away from the afternoon tea-table, and separate until dinner and the arrival of Rowley shall bring them together again.

There is about an hour and a half to dispose of, and an hour and a half, as every woman knows, seems a long time when she is waiting for a lover. For once

Annie would infinitely prefer the society of one of Rowley's sisters to her own thoughts; but Grace has to finish a letter to Grainger, which she fancies it is essential to his happiness shall be posted to-morrow, and Isabel has to supervise some household arrangements which she can better manage with Alice Adair's co-operation than with Annie's. Accordingly the latter strolls out by herself, and as she walks slowly along, heedless of where she is going, bright visions of the future float almost palpably before her, and she is very happy.

In fancy she sees herself a happy wife at last, the proud mother of children with Rowley's eyes, and Rowley's bonny smile; and "Oh, my love! my love!" she thinks, "from to-night the motive of my life shall be to repay you for all the joy you will bring into mine."

She goes down to a seat that is on the borders of the big pond that is almost a

lake, and sits there, watching the water-lilies that are floating so listlessly on its surface, and pictures how a boat-full of bright-haired children shall break the monotonous, sweet, still-life beauty of the scene by-and-by. The time slips by, and she has just looked at her watch, and found that it is time for her to hurry back to the house, when she is startled by hearing hurrying, scrambling footsteps behind her among the crisp ferns and undergrowth, and the next moment her soul quails within her as one hot, nervous hand grasps her shoulder, and the other roughly forces her hat down over her brow, and a voice that curdles her blood with terror, exclaims—

“I am the avenging angel of the Lord ! The sins of the parents must be visited on the children. God has given you into my hands, and I will give you back into His !”

Her terrified heart gives her false strength for a moment ; she struggles and

lifts her head, and her agonized eyes meet others that are full of the wicked light of madness and wrath—the eyes of the dangerous maniac, Sir Oliver.

CHAPTER XIII.

“WHERE IS MY DARLING?”

It is a good coming home! Rowley would be what he is not—a cold-blooded, discontented man indeed, if he did not feel a throb of exultation as he dashes along the drive in the high-wheeled dog-cart, behind the smart trotter that is between the shafts. All things have gone well with him. His pupil has stumbled safely through the crucial test by which he has been tried for an appointment, to gain which many far cleverer men have nearly burst their brains. As a Civil Service tutor, Rowley can now easily make three thousand a year, and during the last six months he has made

several firm friends of men who are in place and power.

Added to this, the Galtonswear affairs have been so thoroughly cleansed and purified by men of integrity, who have not hesitated to cut to cure, that they are in a perfectly healthy, and bid fair to be soon in a flourishing, condition again. Altogether he can well afford to take the bride he has chosen, though in gaining her he will cause her to lose her dower.

It is a good coming home! Peace and prosperity mark his mother's aspect, as she comes out into the hall to meet him, and his pretty sisters are prettier and more pleasing than ever in that resumed air of walking in silk attire which distinguishes them. Grace has the extra air, too, of being "engaged," and independent of all such minor considerations as may be influencing Isabel, whose lines are still falling in the old home places.

"So you've brought Grainger to book

since I saw you, dear," her brother says as he kisses her. "You're a very lucky girl, let me tell you; he's the rising man in landscape, and will be an awful swell next year at the Academy, I hear."

"I don't care for that," Grace says; but she does care for it, nevertheless, and she is so pleased with her brother for mentioning it, that she runs out to the terrace to look for Annie to come in and reward him at once.

"Where is my darling?" Rowley asks, as Grace turns from him; "she promised to be here to meet me. Hasn't she come yet?"

"Annie will be here in a minute," Isabel says. "You don't ask for Alice, Rowley?"

"Is *she* here again?"

There is utter indifference, not a particle of either pain or pleasure or interest in his tone as he asks this, and in the face of such callousness as she considers it, Isabel does not deign to continue the subject.

"I'd better go and see my father at

once," Rowley goes on, turning off in the direction of Sir Oliver's suite of rooms. "Call me directly Annie comes in."

His mother goes with him, and they reach the door of Sir Oliver's sitting-room, talking and laughing brightly and animatedly. "I haven't seen him since afternoon tea," Lady Galton is saying. "Alice and he meant to take a walk in the park. It will do your heart good, Rowley dear, to see your father so like his old self again."

In the innermost recesses of his heart, Rowley feels that if his father would only recover and be utterly unlike his old self, it would be an infinitely pleasanter thing for his family and dependents; but he abstains from wording this feeling.

"Oh, we shall all be as right as possible in time, mother," he says cheerily. "Halloa, Alice!"

She meets them with a pale, frightened face.

“Oh, Rowley, you’ve come! I’m so glad. Lady Galton, have you left Sir Oliver with the girls?”

“I left him with you,” Lady Galton stammers, “when——”

“And I have been asleep,” Alice cries out, “and he has wandered out of the room. Don’t be frightened! don’t cry, dear, dearest Lady Galton; he *can’t* come to harm in the park, and they’d stop him at the gates.”

“There’s the pond,” Lady Galton whispers; and Rowley mutters—

“And there’s Annie in the park. My poor girl!—if he meets her she’ll be frightened out of her life!”

He goes striding out of the house, calling a couple of men-servants to follow him, and away through the woods in search of his father. And the three girls follow him at a distance, trembling and murmuring words of encouragement to one another, and feeling an awful dread of they know not what.

"When did you see him last?" one of them asks Alice; and she replies piteously,

"Just after your mother left us. I had been reading to him, and he seemed sleepy and tired, and fretful at the idea of a walk; he went to lie down on the sofa in his dressing-room, and was asleep at once, and I sat in the window-seat of the sitting-room with a book, and soon I must have slept soundly. When I woke he was gone, and Lady Galton and Rowley were looking for him."

She breaks out into a weary, frightened fit of weeping as she speaks, and the girls—anxious as they are themselves about the unhappy man, who, however disagreeable he may have been to them all their lives, is still their father—seek to cheer her with a few commonplaces.

"Don't cry, Alice dear; it isn't likely that he can have come to any harm here in his own grounds," they say reassuringly, but at the same time they cannot control

the anxiety which is a silent witness against her for that fatal breach of duty, sleeping on guard.

"He has missed his way in the wood-paths." "He has gone home by the back of the house." "He is resting in one of the lodges." "He has fallen asleep under a tree." These and a thousand other suggestions they offer helplessly to each other, as they fight their way along the shortest cut to the pond, through the tangled mass of undergrowth, in Rowley's wake. "Don't cry, Alice! don't distress yourself, Alice! Poor Alice! The worst that can have happened is that poor papa may be frightened, fancying he has lost himself. It's not your fault, we all of us know that." They pour these comforting words in upon Alice Adair as they hurry along, and she heeds not one of them. Her ears are deafened, and her mind is deadened to everything, save the one absorbing desire to find Sir Oliver.

But the deafened ears hear with terrible distinctness presently, when a cry, of such wrath and anguish that it seems to silence every other sound in nature, is borne to them by the terrified breeze that comes up from the lake to meet them. And the deadened mind is vitalized by horror, as, together with Rowley's two sisters, Alice springs over the brow of the lake bank, and sees Rowley trying to wrench Annie's insensible form from the vice-like grip of a chattering, grinning maniac.

It is a sight to blast the vision and to paralyze the nerves of a lover of our species. Sir Oliver is endowed with the strength, ferocity, and agility of a gorilla, as he bounds about close to the edge of the lake, with the helpless woman his son loves in his arms. And Rowley's strength is as the strength of ten as he closes in, and, casting all filial considerations aside, brings all the science he knows to bear on the blows he deals at his father.

His youth, his strength, his love, the righteousness of his cause, win him the battle, and presently Sir Oliver is lying panting on the grass, held down tightly by the two men-servants; while Rowley lays Annie's head on his shoulder, and the three girls bathe her bruised forehead and try to chafe back warmth into her icy hands. She opens her eyes at last, and—better they had never opened again, better that circulation, which had been shocked into stagnation, had never been restored; for as her eyes rove over Rowley's face, she shrieks out in ghastly laughter for a moment, and then, between wild fits of weeping and paroxysms of fearful yells, demands of the God to whom Sir Oliver has delivered her, that He will give her back to Rowley!

CHAPTER XIV.

"WAITING FOR ROWLEY."

Two years have passed away since that brief bit of melodrama was played out on the brink of the lake at Galtonsweir, and the actors in that scene are widely scattered. Sir Oliver Galton has, mercifully for all connected with him, shuffled off this mortal coil for several months. Grace is married, Lady Galton and Isabel are still living on at Galtonsweir, and Alice is with them always now. Sir Rowley has given up work, ceased to take any interest in his estate, and in his family also apparently, for he never comes near them. And Annie is in a lunatic asylum.

Wallace Adair and his wife are living at

a pretty Virginian, creeper-covered villa in the St. John's Wood Road. They are living pretentiously and miserably, as it is the wont of people to live who, having six hundred a year, systematically spend twelve. They have one child, and several pointers and setters. Wallace keeps these latter in readiness for the dawning of those auspicious days when he shall go "down to the country for the birds," or "up to Scotland for the grouse," as he is always prophesying he will do shortly, on the invitation of some of the many men of rank and fortune whose attention he has called to himself at the various clubs to which he has gained admission as a guest by reason of the mixture of *bonhomie* and bombast which makes him so amusing.

Poor Rhoda's experiences of married life have not been happy ones. Wallace has a habit of laying every social rebuff and failure which he meets with at her door; and as he is valiant in going out

and exposing himself to rebuffs and failures, he meets with a good many. The gentle suavity of his manner, and a habit he has, not so much of lying as of exaggerating amazingly, makes him popular with a set of men who delight in "getting a rise" out of his improvisations at the clubs, but who do not care to see him adorning their hearths and homes. And Wallace attributes being thus excluded from the sphere wherein the women reign who belong to the class to which he aspires, to his wife's "gaucheries and ignorances, and general unfitness" (as he declares it to be now) "for the position to which he has elevated her!" He nearly drives Rhoda mad by the way in which he girds at her when she is silent for being stupid, and cavils at her when she speaks for being vulgar. He gets out of temper, and disgusted, and quotes his sister Alice's invariably neat appearance whenever Rhoda looks frayed and shabby. And this is an appearance

she frequently presents; for Wallace seems to think that well-made clothes come by faith, and that money has nothing to do with the procuring of them; and Rhoda is not "handy with her needle." The setters and pointers pull the hems of her garments to pieces in puppy play when they are young, and repose upon her palest bonnets and mantles when they are old. She is always "soiled or ragged," Wallace tells his sister, and Alice agrees with him that "Rhoda is very culpable, and that he is extremely to be pitied."

"If you would only take Fane and have done with it, I should know where to turn when I wanted a penny," he says grumblingly to Alice, who has been brought up to town to hear him recite his financial woes, and to advise him how to get out of them, if such a thing be possible. "I'm not extravagant myself, and Rhoda doesn't spend it in dress, that's clear; still, the money goes, and we're always in debt."

"It's absurd for Rhoda to have her brougham on your income," Alice says, as if Rhoda were to blame for the brougham, or had been suffered to have the use of it more than half a dozen times. "Put it down at once; that will be a clear saving of two hundred a year, and Rhoda will be all the better for taking walking exercise."

"But it doesn't agree with *me*," Wallace pleads. "If I have to hurry to the office my heart goes like mad all day, and I'm not fit for work; and where's the economy of dropping your work and running the risk of being kicked out at any moment for not doing it? No; small retrenchments are no good at all. If I could raise the money from a friend and get clear, and then start free, I should be all right."

"You have started free several times, if you remember," Alice ventures to remind him; but there is nothing unkind or dismally reproachful in her reminder. Alice makes up for the force and fervour with

which she damns everybody else's sins, by absolutely condoning Wallace's.

"You think it's no use my applying to Fane?" he questions, disregarding her remark.

"I am afraid not. He is not mean, but he is not a bit inclined to encourage extravagance; and it would strike him that Rhoda and you must have been very extravagant to have got into such difficulties."

"I wish that poor woman was still in the enjoyment of her senses and her income," Wallace mutters gloomily; "if she were, I shouldn't be in want of the money long if she knew I wanted it."

A spasm of pain contracts Alice's heart at this mention of Annie, and as in a glass once again she sees that sad sight by the lake when the bruised head was lifted up so hopelessly, and the broken, frightened soul failed to reassert itself. The excitement of that terrible time has passed away,

but the dull, crushing horror of it remains still in the minds of all the witnesses of the ghastly scene. At this allusion to Annie which is made now by Wallace in his selfishness, Alice's thoughts revert to all the bright possibilities that were before Rowley and Annie up to the moment of that awful day when the blow fell. "How will he ever bear to come home and live in the place where she was *worse* than murdered! But then, we none of us know what we can do and endure till we are tried," she says to her brother, and he assents to her proposition with a brief nod, and goes on with the discussion of his own affairs.

The Graingers are back in London now, and it is a source of great pride to his wife that "Arthur's studio is the most perfect of the school to which he belongs." They are a refreshingly easy-going and happy couple, for Grace takes the temporary

devotion he shows to every pretty woman he meets in the pleasantest manner possible. He has recurred now to his old admiration for Rhoda, and Rhoda not finding the present very heart-filling or satisfactory in any way, is quite ready to rake over the ashes of the past with him, and stir a sentimental fire if possible in his heart and her own. In reality there is not a particle of wrong or even of romance in the renewal of their intercourse, and Grace knows this truth, and so is carelessly contented to see her husband harmlessly engaged in studying from the life. But Wallace, who has no affection for his wife, but who has a lively sense of his rights of ownership, seethes and fumes whenever she gives a smile or happy look to Grainger. The smile is only caused, as a rule, by pleasure at his praise of her pretty child. The happy look is given probably to his reference to those old days at Hengeholme, when she, his child-comrade, had no fear

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of Wallace or anybody else before her eyes. But innocent as they are, they rouse the torpid tiger in Wallace, and add to the gathering unhappiness in their unhappy home.

It is at Grainger's studio one day that the Adairs—Wallace, his wife, and Alice—meet Sir Rowley again, and they drop into the old familiarity and friendship at once, without any of the agony and embarrassment which some of them have thought it would be their portion to feel should they ever come together. Time has toned down the bitterness of Rowley's grief in a great measure, and, being a man, he has forgotten that poor Alice was an innocent instrument in working out the evil destiny of the woman who would have been his wife. Accordingly, he meets Alice cordially and kindly, and at the sight of him, at the sound of his voice, she feels that she must give Albert Fane to understand that she renounces him definitely for ever.

“Rowley wants us to go down to Galtonswear with him,” Grace tells them by-and-by; and she adds that she thinks the plan a good one for him, though Arthur and herself would rather stay and see the season out. “If he goes down with a party, he won’t have time to brood over that living sorrow of his,” she adds with tears in her eyes; for Grace, now that she is happily married, and enjoying peace and prosperity, is very sympathetic. And out of this remark of hers that it will be “well for Rowley to go home with a party,” there grows the idea that it will be better still if the Adairs accompany him also.

So once again they all assemble at Galtonswear, and the truth of the old adage, that “no one is missed long,” asserts itself with cruel, natural force. They are all perfectly well occupied, and reasonably happy in their respective ways, and it is only spasmodically that any one of them

remembers that the light of life is over, though she still lives, for the one who two years ago was the mainspring and motive-power of everything around them.

It is only wise and well that it should be thus. Sooner or later the inevitable day will dawn when every one of us will be forgotten utterly, and done without easily. By the time the forgetfulness falls absolutely upon the spirits of those who have been dear, we are callous, as a rule. It is the premonitory symptoms which are so charged with bitterness that they wring a cry of pain from the stoutest-hearted of us.

It is only wise and well and natural that Rowley should bury his dead, and find balm in Gilead! And Alice makes him a true, faithful, and sensible wife. Still, occasionally, the memory of what might have been rankles in her husband's breast, when he pays his periodical visit to the

asylum, and hears the plaintive tone in which a sad, frightened woman tells him (as she looks into his face, without a gleam of recognition) that she is "waiting for Rowley."

THE END.

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